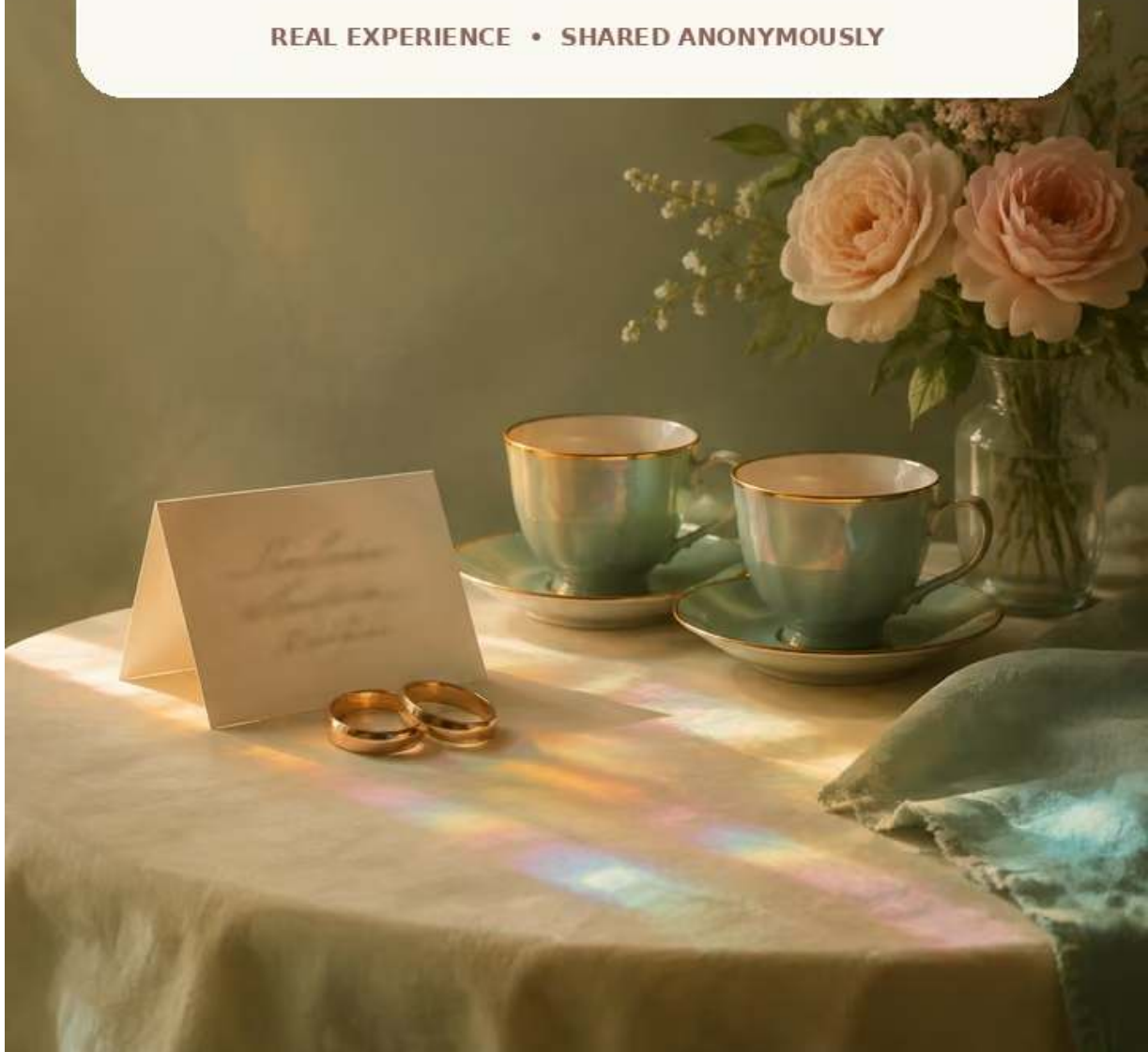


LGBTQ+ REAL EXPERIENCES

I STILL SAY 'WE'

When the nervous system has not caught up with safety

REAL EXPERIENCE • SHARED ANONYMOUSLY



I Still Say 'We'

When the nervous system has not caught up with safety

I'm 38, married to my wife, and we've been together for eleven years.

I work in a really supportive office. There are Pride flags every June, my manager is openly gay, and nobody has ever given me a reason to think they wouldn't accept me.

Yet every Monday, when someone asks, "What did you do at the weekend?" I still catch myself saying...

"We went to the coast."

"We had friends over."

"We watched a film."

Never "My wife and I..."

It happens before I've even thought about it.

Sometimes I drive home afterwards and think, Why did I do that again?

The truth is, for years I had to hide. At school, being called gay wasn't just an insult—it could make you a target. At my first job, people made jokes about lesbians all the time, so I learned to keep quiet.

I got so used to editing myself that it became automatic.

Now, even though I'm safe, my brain still behaves as if I'm not.

My therapist once said something that stayed with me:

- "Your environment has changed, but your nervous system hasn't caught up yet."

That made so much sense.

I don't hate who I am.

I'm not ashamed of my marriage.

I'm just unlearning years of believing it was safer not to mention it.

Now, when I notice myself saying "we", I don't criticise myself anymore.

Sometimes I gently correct it.

"Actually... my wife and I went away."

It's only one extra word.

But every time I say it, it feels like I'm reclaiming a tiny piece of myself.

Reflection

Sometimes internalised stigma isn't about believing there's something wrong with you.

Sometimes it's the habits you developed to stay safe that quietly remain long after the danger has gone.

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.