

Interview a gay man at 23

**When did you learn about yourself? And how did you come out to your father?**

I am Nix, 23 years old and coming to 24 this December. When I first learnt about myself was I was on grade 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>. I was 10 or 11 years old. I felt weird when girl with guy and I felt crush on a guy later.

It was you felt when someone touched you. You felt shy, but lady touched you, you felt nothing. That was I knew that I liked guy. When you were a kid, you had no clue what it was, but you had feeling. I thought if I was close to lady, I would felt differently, but I felt nothing.

I was not completely sure about myself until I was 15 and I had boy friend and I felt sure about myself.

At the age of 16, there was internet and we started searching information and we found information and how it called . It happened with everyone.

So at age of 16, you felt no nervous or anything when I realized that I was gay . It was just ok to be that way. I am open and I always try to be positive. So I was not nervous.

I came out to my Dad two years ago. The first time I moved out when I felt in love with my 2<sup>nd</sup> boyfriend. In our culture, moving out at that age, it was big thing. I hung out a lot with foreinger and the second boyfriend was boy friend, it was a good time to move out. And I felt very secured when I moved out from my family to live with this ex-boyfriend.

It is better to just go out by my own. I went out with my ex, so actually it was very secured. I wanted to tell my dad before, but I did not know how he would react. Actually, my family was the last person to know. I cared about my family's feeling, so I did not tell them. So I was open up to many people, but not my Dad. I did not know how he would react. I was waiting until my 21 birthdays. I had 7 BD cakes for a week. By that time, I loved Recording everything. Then I made everything into one video. When I was young, we did not have birthday things, so now 21, I had many BD. So he came and took me to a restaurant, and he talked with everyone. So story came up and we talked about gay kids, he said now there were a lot of gay and it was hard to tell how he actually thought. When went home and showed him a round and the video. Then I wanted to tell him so bad but I did not know how to start. But then he asked me when I wanted to get married, so I just said, I I don't like girls. At the the right time when he asked me about my marriage, I said I did not

like girls. I just said so. As I wanted to tell him but I did not know how to start, so when he asked, I told him right away.

He said you are 21, and it is ok. I married your mother when I was 30. So I said, "But I don't really like girls"

He said that was ok, you still had several years to figure out about loving girls. Maybe now it is too young. So I asked him if he remembered the guy I took home three years ago and he said yeah..., and I told "that was my ex-boyfriend".

He was like.... speechless. He did not say anything but his face just like....his face did not move that much. I was surprised. I told him the video and said that "you see in the video there are many people around and they know who I am and they are happy for me to be who I am around them. They are my family and I do not want you to be my family and you do not know anything about me at all. You are my dad and you deserve to know. Because I do not want our relationship to be broken and I care about your feeling, so you are the last person who know about this. With other people, I do not care what they feel, so I just tell them who I am right away, because if they accept me, they will accept me, but if they don't, I don't care because I can't make everyone happy. But I just want to make my family happy. He asked me if it was real. So I told him if he noticed when I was a kid or not, but sometimes, I played some girls' stuffs, sometimes I did things boys often do. I tried to be different but I can't because I was born this way. Except being gay, I did not do anything that is criminal stuffs. Because I was independent already and I did not make a lot of huge mistakes since I was a kid, so kindly respect my decision as well. He said he loved me and he wanted me to think about my future, about how it could be and how I got there. He said once I decided, just stick with it and be happy. And whoever I was going to pick, a girl or boy, just pick the nice one.

### **Did he tell your mother and other people in your family?**

I don't have a mom since I was 11. I grew up with my grandparents. They knew about me but not because I came out. Before, I had some feminine signs like playing dolls sometimes, not much. I basically played a lot of things including dolls that guys did not do. I had an uncle on my Facebook friend list and I forgot. On the April Fool, my friend living in Australia and I wanted to fool people but did not know what to do, so we made a fake relationship as we were both in Malaysia at that time. A lot of people was fooled by that.

And around Khmer New Year, I came home to see my family and my uncle asked me why I didn't

bring my husband, and I said I did not have a husband. Then I stopped a moment and thought it was weird. Then when the party was over, he cleaned and he told me "I told you it would be much better if you brought your husband here so he could help us clean."

"What is happening", I thought and I forgot what I posted on Facebook and he was my friend on Facebook. The next morning, when I said good-bye to go to Phnom Penh and my grandma said "That's ok, grandson. You did not do anything wrong, so you are still human being." I thought it was weird when she said so. Then my grandpa asked "do you think in the future you will like a girl?" I said "I don't think so. I might be, but now I can't". After that, my grandma did not ask me about marriage anymore as she had asked before.

I did not talk about that later with my uncle. But a week ago, my grandma asked me about bringing my husband to visit her with me and I told her that "nobody has asked me to become my husband yet".

One of the things is that I did not make any huge mistake, so they kind of trust what I am doing.

When I told my dad but before I did Pride here, and I talked with a lot of people. I did not push people to come out because coming out could break relationships. So I told people that if they were ready because it could be good or bad, as some people were kicked out from home. So when I asked that question, people had to think and might delay a bit. I didn't persuade people to come out, because I did not know their circumstance.

We don't talk about gay though here. But people were teased and mocked, but gay men are getting less and less being teased. So are lesbians. The ones who face the most difficult situation are transgender.

Since I was a child, somebody teased me I was gay, I said "I am" and I have a good job now and position and I am doing a lot of wonderful things, so I am less likely being mocked.

### **Advices for gay youth or younger generations?**

I have seen a lot of people lately that they are throwing themselves on a lot of crazy things like sexual stuffs, and I am worried for them. They are also crazy about love, and I want them to think a bit. They follow the heart but also the brain as well. There are a lot of things beside love. And there are a lot of new things they want to follow, but think a bit.

I am still young, but being gay is not my case any more. I am open up and that is not my problem. So focus on future is my focus. I then my family that I want to adopt kids, and a lot of people ask me why I do not have my own kids. Even if I was straight, I still do not have my own kids. I still want to adopt. Now, there is service if I want my biological kids, but I want to adopt abandon kids because these kids need love. Doing that, I at least can make some kids happy. There are many kids out there, why would I have my own kids. Some people here are rich but they are not independent. So they have to follow their family wish. They even did not try to live the way they want. They have to get married and have their own kids, and it is sad.

### **Happy Moments?**

I can't tell you because I have many.

But one of the most happy moments I had was with my ex-boyfriend's mom. His family was open, and I hung out with his mom when he was out and she answered someone's question if I was her son and she said yes. I was happy because I did not have a mom since I was very young. I just smiled when I heard but I was very happy.

### **Life lessons:**

Don't fall in love so quick. Whatever you do, always think about the worst scenario.

### **When did you learn that?**

Life.

I have been living independently for three years and I loved listening to people. Everyone has different opinions and takes some part of these. At the end of the day, you have to make your decision, but listening will give you some things to learn too.

### **My dream for the future?**

I want to earn a lot of money. I want to do something for this country. I don't plan to move to live somewhere else. Here many people know me and accept me, I can't ask for more than that as it is a happy life that I am having. In the future, I want to open my own company and have good relationships with just one guy, and get along with family and friends.

I like to experience things. By age 23, I have been working for 5 years as a graphic designer and did an internship in Malaysia. I am doing social marketing a lot. So I am doing as a model and photographer. I want to try a bit of this and that and let's see.

When I get very comfortable, I do not like it. I like some challenges. Lately I have been involved of organizing. I like to try, so put my hands on different things. I did some video commercial, radio, doing something in youth leadership. I try to see if it works, you never now until you try it.

Lately there are more famous gay people opening up. The discrimination still happens, but it happens everywhere. Some old people could not understand. Our country had been through hard time about war, they were there at that very moment, so maybe the old people doesn't need to understand.

Did you observe a lot of LGBT movement in Cambodia

I only started to involve in LGBT activity this year. In Cambodia, the Organization and Business work differently, Business part they are more fun and enjoying life, while NGO works on doing research about the issue and mostly it's sad. In business part also has sad part of course, but NGO teaches people how to be a better people. I am quite new in Organization part, I started to understand what's going on in LGBT issue from NGO perspective.

The voice of LGBT people is unbalanced, mostly only GAY voice that is represented not the transgender or other community. I think it's because a lot of famous gay guys coming out and being captured by the media, also for example we have Gay bar but not Lesbian Bar, etc. I'm not sure why but from my point of view, some organizations have a lot of Lesbians as the members, but the Gay voice is shouted still louder. I have been in so many Gay event, there are so many gay people who are shouting out about their pride but not the lesbians. I have no clue why this is happening, but I think, transgender is being the one that discriminated the most. Several years ago, there was a Beauty Pageant for the Lady Boy, but the winner does not participate in any social issue after the pageant, she's a little away from society, but she's one of the famous lady boy.

Lady boy in English and Khmer has different meaning. In Cambodia we have Kateuy to describe people who don't belong to man and woman. I don't exactly understand too the meaning of gay as a word, I'm not sure it covers everything or not. For me, being gay or anything, it doesn't matter, because my boss or anyone knows and I always be who I am, I

talk the way I talk, but I don't want to shout every time to people that I'm gay, only if they ask I will tell them. I like to be surrounded by people who understand who I am, for those who don't understand or don't want to understand, we can't force them. When I was in Malaysia, I came out to some people, and there was one guy who looked scared, I started to explain to them being gay doesn't mean we want every guy to sleep with us, after I explained to them, they started to open up about the idea of Gay.

**If you could change one thing in Cambodia, what is it ?**

I wish all parents understand their children and not force their children to marry, for example, it's a tradition in Cambodia girls are being married by their parents with someone she doesn't even know. But again, this kind of thing depends on the family and the person itself.

For people who come to exhibition please share in Sharing Section, I know some gays in Cambodia are in closet, so that is why I would like to encourage them to open up and share their feelings. I have an idea about "Confession Box" where people can say whatever they want without being seen. I think being LGBT is a gift; it is your decision to make it positive or negative. If you can make everything positive, you'll have a happy life. I like the way I am, I never wanted to be a girl, I don't want to have a period and carry a baby. I like being who I am right now, a gay guy. All girls and guys have the same right.

**Do you think a guy has more power in a family?**

I think it depends on who makes more money. Women love gifts from a guy, I mean, they value gifts as a form of love from a guy. I also believe that women are more emotional. About a guy who likes to pay, I think it shows that the guy values the girls.