

Pride week

I think that there must be a lot that is wrong with me.

The thing is, I never realised there was so much wrong with me until I became a teenager.

Up until then, I thought I was okay. Not only okay, but loved even. I thought people liked me for who I was and I never gave it a second thought.

Until someone called me “Ears”. My ears grew a little faster than my head when I was younger, and they stuck out from my head, rather than sticking to the sides. And so, because they looked different to other peoples, people started calling me “Ears”. I know I’ve told you all this before. There was even a great joke about my ears: how do you make Ben Arcus’s ears two miles wide? You fold them in half.

So, I realised that I looked funny, that I was clearly ugly.

I was also really into computer games at that age. I loved playing them and reading about them, and inventing computer games in my head. I even got into computer programming and tried to make my own computer games. I actually wanted to be a computer programmer for a long time, until I saw some guys at school being teased for being into computer games. I saw some boys calling

Rev. Ben Arcus

other boys nerds and teasing them and telling them they were losers, because they were into computers and because they talked about computer games at lunchtime. I was so scared of being teased that I stopped talking about computer games with people, and I stopped learning to programme, and I eventually stopped playing computer games. I hadn’t realised that I was so weird for playing computer games, so I decided to hide it and change that about myself so that I wouldn’t get teased.

I also really liked reading books. But guess what? I saw some kids getting teased and picked on for reading books. I hadn’t realised that reading was weird too, so I had to stop doing that too.

The same went for being into drama. I was really quite into drama, and quite a good actor. I would like to think that I could have been quite good at it, and I could have been in some plays. But I heard some people being teased for that too, and when I once mentioned that I liked drama and theatre sports, some other people laughed nastily at me and told me that it was weird and only losers were into drama.

There was only really one thing I *wasn’t* interested in at school, and that was sport. I just didn’t get it and didn’t enjoy playing it. But if I didn’t join in with other

people playing sport at lunchtime, then I was told to stop being a loser. And so, I spent my time at college, throwing or kicking around a ball with all the other guys. And I was really bad at it. And I never did the things that I was really good at, or the things I really enjoyed, because I was scared of being teased and rejected and bullied.

I hid who I really was, and became someone I thought people would like more.

And I got really depressed. Because being someone you're not makes you depressed. Feeling like you can't be who you really are makes you depressed. And it made me not want to be alive, because what's the point of living if you can't really be you, right?

And despite feeling this way, that I didn't fit in, that I wasn't accepted for who I was, and that it wasn't okay to be me, I think that it would have felt ten times worse if I was gay. Because anyone who was thought to be gay, or boys who were feminine, or girls who were masculine, or anyone who would be considered in the rainbow community, these kids were treated terribly. Way worse than I was.

And I guess that explains why young people who identify as being in the rainbow community are 400% more likely to try and end their life, than anyone else.

I want to sing you a song today. It's called Simon by a band called Lifehouse. Lead singer Jason Wade said: "I wrote this about a friend of mine who told me about his childhood. He was telling me how he went to school and was the outcast and everyone picked on him and called him names, and he didn't have one friend."

I know a little bit about how that feels. A lot of you know how that feels.

And so I want to sing this song for all of you who feel this. And if you are in the rainbow community, then I am especially singing this song for you today.