

It was the summer before junior year, and I had just come out to my mom, who was currently at home with my dad in the Bay Area. I had just arrived in Los Angeles for a two-week film camp, surrounded by people I didn't know. I loved film and I wanted to learn more about it, so I was excited to get away from everything and focus on my passions. But also, I thought coming out before this big change would exempt me from hearing my parent's reactions.

Running away from problems was always my solution. I spent my entire sophomore year living a double life, scared that my mom was mad at me because I knew she could tell I was hiding something. Coming home felt like I was entering an unknown world where people called me by the wrong name. All I wanted to do was escape. Many nights I would dream that my room would detach from the house and fly away into space. I felt like no one could understand me, although I wouldn't know because I never opened up to anyone.

But now I was at film camp, and everyone was calling me by my real name, Alex, and I could finally write this name in my worksheets and name tags. It eventually became natural, and even though it felt liberating, it felt like I had been Alex my whole life. I was one of the only trans people at camp, but I was surrounded by people who understood me.

The first time we had lunch, a group of people sat around me and started talking. It felt really easy to carry a conversation. It wasn't just our love of filmmaking that made us similar, but we were all in a new place and wanted to make friends.

Our friendship soon turned to teamwork as we learned about filmmaking. Two weeks of learning different shots, learning how to use microphones and cameras, and screenwriting. Each group had five hours to shoot a whole film. The LA heat was unbearable, especially while carrying all our equipment around, but it was the first time I felt like a professional director.

On the last night, the temperature finally dropped and the whole camp threw a party. I had made a lot of friends but I was still afraid of being left out, so I left the party to go walk around campus. I had tried to escape again, but my friends caught up with me. We hiked to the top of a hill near the campus to see a panoramic view of the city at night. The lights sparkling below us calmed and comforted me. I had finally found a community.

I still wanted to forget about my parents and life in the Bay Area, but one night my dad video called me. I saw my dad's face saying, "Hi Alex!" It was the first time I had ever heard him say my name. And then I realized I didn't have to run away or be fearful of my parents' reactions. My dad had accepted me as his son, the thing I wanted most for the past year.

By the time he picked me up from camp, I was a different person. We still talked like we always did, so on the outside it looked exactly the same. But as we drove across the Mojave desert, I finally felt ready to go home. Not only had I found a new appreciation for film, but I had also found my identity. I learned the technical skills of filmmaking as well as the teamwork that is essential to bringing a film to life.