

Asha: An Unexpected Connection

ACT 1:

"Tegan, you have two moms, right?" I look up from my plate of pasta to a sea of faces staring at me. I arrived in New York City the day before, ready to start the summer film program at the School of Creative and Performing Arts (SOCAPA). I have been anticipating this day for months, excited to meet other artists like me. However, my excitement is dampened by one girl who is smiling at me with challenging eyes as she waits for my response. My palms sweat. It takes a second to get grounded before I deliver my best, most confident "Yes."

Sometimes, I forget that my family doesn't fit the traditional model, which often confuses or provokes people. "Wait, so tell us how that works." She leans back, elbows resting on the edges of her chair. I put my discomfort aside and explain how I was born and the inner workings of my family. As I describe my parents' relationship, I emphasize the love and care they share rather than focusing on their sexuality.

I have been explaining my background to people my entire life, becoming more confident over time, so much so that I developed "a script" for such occasions. "My moms chose to have me through sperm donation. My uncle is biologically my dad since he is the brother of my non-biological mom..." (Blah, blah, blah.) Sometimes, I throw in the story of how half of my DNA was delivered to my moms in a FedEx box.

ACT 2:

The Girl smirks, then asks "the question." I half expect it, but not with such conviction. "Well, don't you think that because your parents are lesbians, that's why you are?" I hate this question, but under the gaze of everyone around the table, it's not the time to make a scene. "I'm not who I am because of who my parents are. I'm bisexual, and I've known since I was young." My words hang in the air.

From my experience, humans are fundamentally empathetic creatures who either act on their compassionate instincts or deny them. People often ask inappropriate, even outlandish, questions when they can't relate to an experience. Instead of lashing out or staying quiet, I've learned that describing my situation openly leads to more understanding and connections, some with people I would never expect to call friends.

ACT 3:

For the next three weeks the Girl, Asha, and I work together on multiple projects, directing side by side, learning from one another, and creating interesting films. Though our personalities differ, we connect through our shared passion — filmmaking. We put our differences aside, focus on the actors and the story, and ultimately make films that resonate with us both.

On the last day, packed up to go our separate ways, AshaThe Girl approaches me tentatively. Hugging me goodbye, she whispers, "Oh, also, I think I'm gay. I'm gonna try to tell my mom." With others around us, I don't say anything, but I smile to show my support. Since then, I've seen through Instagram that Asha's family is in the public eye and holds anti-LGBT beliefs. I can't help but feel sad for her, and it's made me much more aware and grateful for my own circumstances.

I've found that openness — with others and ourselves — helps us see through our differences to find commonality, resulting in more raw, collaborative art. I've always been drawn to movies that focus on deep human interactions, whether highlighting the magic of connections or the tragedy that can result from miscommunication. My experience with Asha could have been a missed connection, but it became something real. I'm at the beginning of my filmmaking journey. Still, I believe my background — and its

influence on my relationships with others — gives me the perspective to create stories, direct actors, and ultimately make films that spark an unexpected connection.