

Nikki



“My grandparents have always taught me to shake hands, to introduce yourself, to be kind, to be courageous, to be welcoming, to extend yourself to others, and that what you put into life, life will give back to you.”

I was born Nichole. I prefer to go by Nikki. And, I took my grandfather's surname when I was nineteen. It was my grandparents who raised me for the greater part of my life. They gave me the unconditional love that I wanted as a child, and that I still seek very often in my adulthood, and the confidence, the drive, the ambition, and the basis for everything that I believe in.

I'm currently an RN student at Citrus College. Prior to that I spent approximately 5 years in the army. I left when I was other than honorably discharged. I had been sexually assaulted, and one of the people in my unit was there when it happened. Attending drill was revisiting that trauma for me, so I stopped going. Back then, there was the "don't ask, don't tell" concept in the military. For me to prove my innocence would be exposing

that I was gay, and that could end up in a discharge anyway. After a conversation with my officers, I just got a letter in the mail one day saying that I was no longer in the army.

I'm gay, and I "dress gay," though I hate to use those words to classify myself. I'm full with tattoos and I've always had short hair. I walk down the street and people are afraid of me. They grab their children! At job interviews there have been so many times I immediately get looked up and down, like, "Okay, are you gonna be an appropriate representation of our company?" They're so focused on the exterior that the question of being capable for the position never really surfaces.

I try not to be aggressive, like "Well, why don't you like my tattoos and that I have short hair?" When you're forceful, it leaves a bad taste in people's mouths. But I am



"It is a representation of my optimism to challenge others to break the walls of racism and educate themselves in hopes for a better today and more unified tomorrow."



keeping my hair longer than I used to. I hate that I have to do this in order to be respected as a human. But instead of telling you what to think or what to do, if I can have the opportunity to make a connection with you and let you see me for who I am rather than "that feminist lesbian with an attitude," I can leave my fingerprints in your life.

I know that if I can be a positive representation of a community, something better is going to come out from it. And if you are going to judge me, it can be as a human rather than as a gay person, or a woman, or someone who is educated. I've had a lot of success with that. Because everybody has some type of humanity, whether it's buried deep in there or not.

I think my greatest accomplishment thus far in life is my daughter. She's such a spicy little girl with such a big personality. She's given me so much more drive and ambition to be a better person, and to be greater than I ever thought I could be. And to be brave, and step outside of my comfort zone to make others feel in that manner. It's like my heart is just not in my chest anymore. It's with her, in Upland, playing with my grandparents right now.

My wife and I conceived our daughter using an anonymous donor. There are people who ask, "Well, who's the dad?" Being a "dad" is an earned role. Does it really matter if she has a dad, or if you think it's right or wrong that we had children? Or, does it matter that we are raising this amazing human, and that when you meet her she will change your life?

Crafted by Nikki as an opportunity for interpretation – hammers can be used to break, but also to build. She sees educating ourselves as a way to bridge the gap of marginalization.

It's not having a mommy and a daddy that makes you great. It's being loved, unconditionally. My grandpa is my dad. That's why I took his name, because it was he who built me as an individual. My grandpa was a construction worker, a roofer, a lifting weight macho man, and he had me do it all with him. We love building stuff all the time. And it was never a question of what my role was. It was just wherever you are is where you belong.

So often parents will try to change their children, because they know how hard it's going to be for their child to be who they are, or they see their child as a reflection of themselves. When a child comes out as gay, it can be stressful and devastating to know that they could potentially have a life of adversity, because you only want the best for them. But for your child to choose to be brave enough to be who they are, and to be sure about it, that means you've loved them the right way.