

Background

Francis: My name is Francis Putori. I am the father of Matthew Putori.

Cheryl: I'm Cheryl Putori. I'm Matthew's mother.

Matt: I'm Matthew Putori and my parents are Francis and Cheryl Putori.

Matt: I grew up in a small town in New York State, about 4,000 people. I have an older sister. She's two years older than I am. She graduated high school and went to a Catholic university in Rochester, New York, and then when I graduated high school I went to a Jesuit University in Boston and then I spent a year volunteering in Sudan with the Salesian priests and nuns and in El Obeid, Sudan. And then I moved to New York City where I went to Fordham which is a Jesuit Law School in New York City.

Francis: My occupation is the co-owner of Putori's Broadway Market. It's our family business, it's been there 86 years. I've had it since 1973, I've run it, I, before that I worked as a child in there for my aunt and uncle and my grandmother.

Cheryl: I work at our store. When we got married my husband and I came to work for him, with him. It was his family's business. He was the third generation to own the business. So, I came after I went to college, came home, and now I'm in the store.

Matt: Growing up, our, our house was the house that everybody came to, that everybody congregated at after a basketball game on a Friday night, and now, even when I'm home visiting my family, after mass we go to the Saturday vigil after mass people come over for wine and cheese and crackers. So it's always been a house that's been full of life and full of energy and yeah just really, it was really a fantastic place to grow up.

Matthew Coming Out

Matt: I came out to myself my last year of university, it was the Fall semester, and I knew though that when I finally accepted it for myself that the first people I wanted to tell were my parents. Growing up in a small town you quickly learn that, um, news travels quickly. So I wanted to make sure that they heard it from me and I wanted to do it in person so I had to wait probably about four or five weeks before the next time I was home, I went home for Thanksgiving. I decided that I would tell them then. So it was the first night back in my house for Thanksgiving break from, from school and we were sitting down with, I was just with my parents, we were having dinner. We went the first course and I couldn't say anything, I was too nervous. Then we had the second course and I was still too nervous, so then finally as we were finishing desert I knew that the moment, had come so my parents knew that something was bothering me. They could tell and we had talked a little bit about it, that something was wrong. And so, I said, when there was no more time left, I said, you know there's something I have to tell you. And my father leaned back in his chair and said, you're going to tell us you're gay, right? And I said yes, and I was so relieved because at that point I couldn't even say the word gay, it was so hard for me to say that so for someone else to, to say it and to take that pressure off of my was, was quite a relief. So we, we talked a little bit about it, they both hugged me, my mother cried a little bit, but she did so because I think, and what she said then was, you know, I

want you to be happy, and I appreciated the...all of that, you know, it...I think it...for a lot of people coming out to...to your family, it can be difficult and the reactions can be hard and thankfully my parents were in a place where we could all acknowledge it, and continue to love each other.

Cheryl: Well...I mean we knew something was wrong, four or five weeks prior to him coming home from school for that Thanksgiving break. He would call, we'd talk to him on the telephone like we'd talk to him almost day but, there was just oh there was something wrong, we knew there was something wrong and we tried to talk to him about it, you know, what's the problem and he just, he, obviously didn't want to tell us that way, and we were both concerned about what's going on with Matthew because it was never like him to be like that. And so, he said when I come home, you know, we'll talk about it, so when he did come home, and he told, and right before he came home, actually, my husband had said to me, I think when Matthew comes home he's going to tell us he's gay. And I'm like, no. I mean I don't know, I just never had given that a thought in my mind whatsoever, not ever considered it. And so, when my husband said that to me I'm like there's no way. I'm going to tell you that's what he's going to tell us. And, so I think I almost brushed that off, I'm like, he's not going to tell us that. Well, when he did, I don't have a problem with him being gay. I think at first I was more concerned for him, you hear a lot of negative from people. And in society, you know they can be mean, they can be bullying, they can be hurtful. And I never wanted that, would want that for him, to someone to treat him like that because he is gay. I think as a mother that was my biggest concern, I didn't even stop to think about, you know, being Catholic, and that aspect of it, that was never a concern. I've always loved Matthew unconditionally and as a parent that was always, and maybe it's more of a mother thing, and you always love your children unconditionally. And, so, when he did tell us, I think I cried because I was happy that he told us, and that he took that pressure off himself of having to tell us. And I also was, like, concerned, that he would always be happy and always be safe, but, you know, I love him unconditionally and I don't care whether he's pink with white polka dots, I'm going to love him no matter what. So, I just think it was healthy for all of us to have that conversation.

Francis: And I think when Matthew told us, he came out, I said "Matt, I've known this for two years, that you were gay." But I said he had to find out for himself. And my biggest concern with Matthew being gay is our religion. Because I know how faithful we were to the church and now, once, and I know our church does not accept gay people, or the act of being gay. And if he said to me, dad I have to leave the Catholic Church because they don't accept me, I would say Matthew I understand completely. You know, you have to do, wh-. You can go to a church that loves you and take...and, and respects you, that's what you need to do.

Reconciling Faith & Sexuality

Matt: We went to mass every week as a family, we did everything that we were supposed to do but we didn't necessarily delve into deep conversations about what the Catholic Church said, or did, or what faith was for us. It was a private faith. We did all of these things together but we didn't necessarily talk about it. And what's interesting to me is that I think that, uh, my coming out, at least for me, actually helped me deepen my faith. Explore my faith in a way that I probably wouldn't otherwise had I not come out because suddenly I was faced with something that I found to be in conflict with the Catholic Church so then I really had to discern and evaluate

what all of this meant and it's something that I thought about and I've struggled with and I think now it's probably something we talk more about our Catholic faith sexuality than we do probably anything else, while still continuing to go to church and do all of the things we're supposed to do and that we want to do, but also now kind of on a, a deeper level.

Cheryl: I think it's made me stop and look at the Catholic faith, I never really had given it much thought before, this aspect of it, because it didn't, had never affected me in any way personally, but now that it has, I kind of think why, why are they judgmental, you know I know it's their teachings but at the same time, you know, my belief is, God taught us to love one another. He didn't say love one another because you're this kind of person or that kind of person. It was to love one another. And we should be accepting of everyone. And if the church doesn't change that I think they're going to lose a lot more people. I love my faith, I've always believed to be a very faithful person. I've always been a Christian, and there are many wonderful aspects to the Catholic faith, and, but this one, this, this one particular part that affects me personally, I think the church really needs to consider because it's not only me personally, there's a large number of people in the whole world this affects, so I think the church really needs to look at this.

Francis: I agree a hundred percent with Cheryl. I said I love our, our mass, the mass is super. And I love going to church, I'm in the choir I sing with the church. But some of the teachings need to be changed, I mean they need to update them some and I hate to say that, and say well, you know it's been two thousand years and we've been surviving well now, it's time, I think it's time to change. I really do.

Matt: I'm fortunate to live now in New York City where I have a choice about the type of parish that I attend. And I also am very fortunate that I found a parish community that I find to be very welcoming, very loving, very non-judgmental, and very progressive. And that's important to me and to be honest, if this parish didn't exist I don't know if I would continue to go to a Catholic Church. Because I think the Catholic Church's message to sexual minorities and about sexual ethics does more harm than anything. And I have a, a real struggle with associating myself when an institution or a body who I think is doing damage. And so, because I found a church at a very local level that I think welcomes people, that's how I can continue to practice my faith. But I'm very intentional about how I present as Catholic, how I identify as Catholic, where the money that I give goes because I want it to go to support work that I think supports the, the message of Catholicism, which I view as love and non-judgment, and, and being welcoming.

Matt: When I go back to this small town and visit my family and we go to church as we did as when I was a child every Saturday vigil mass. It's not that I don't feel welcome there but I feel a little hesitant, I'm always a little more cognizant of the fact that I'm gay because I don't know a lot of the people anymore and I don't know the priest and I don't know what the priest thinks of me. And, it's not that that parish has not created an environment that I felt completely welcomed in, and that that that's hard because you want to be able to go to mass and not have to think about anything else other than the fact that you're at mass. I think the, the, for me the underlying message of Catholicism is love. And that is why I stay part of the church, even though I continue to struggle and question a lot of the things that the church does. I think the church is right on so many things, on social justice, on solidarity, economic equality, on all of these things, the church is, is really fantastic about it. And I, and I witness this, in Sudan. The Catholic Church that was

there, the nuns and the priests who were on the ground providing services, were fantastic. They gave wholly of themselves and I think there are so many great things that the Catholic Church does. And I think if the church can return to and focus on, and prioritize this message of love, it changes the dialogue completely, um and I think that, that's what needs to happen, it's, it's I don't expect the church to change its teaching. But I do expect the church that I'm a part of, that I support, is willing to say above all else, that everyone should be loved. Period.

Cheryl: If Matthew came to us and said he had found a partner and say they wanted to get married, I'm, I think my husband and I, I know my husband and I would want to love that person just like he would.

Francis: I can marry people in my house, that'd be great. Say Matt, come on, I'll marry, it'll be great.

Cheryl: But, you know, our faith again teaches us that we should love people. And accept people and that's what I would want for him, someone that really, truly, loved him, and he loved equally, and wants to spend his life with. I would be, overjoyed to know that he had someone in his life that he truly loved, and loved him in return.

What Dialogue Do You Hope This Video Inspires?

Cheryl: I would hope that the Catholic Church definitely has a dialogue about this. And the fact that they need to just become more accepting of people. I mean, we're a church based on love, and how can we say that we're a loving, accepting faith, if we don't accept certain people because that's the way they are. The world has changed. Society has changed. People have changed. The way people live has changed through over two-thousand years. And, you know, lots of things have to change in our lives. And I think this dialogue really has to happen to make the church more welcoming and accepting of all kinds of people.

Francis: You know I talked about our store, about changing. That store has been there eighty-six years, now it hasn't been two thousand years, but it's been eighty-six years but we've had to change throughout the time because of the fact that, you know, everything does change, people change so our product line has changed. We have to do that. If not, we would have died a long time ago. So, by updating and keeping things fresh, making changes, we survive. And I think the church needs to start doing that.

Matt: I think what's interesting is that the Catholic Church probably thinks that it is accepting of gay people. Because its message is gay people exist and we should love them and not discriminate against them. But because the church also tells gay people, essentially that they need to be celibate, what the church is saying is you cannot live fully. You can be gay, but you can't live that life. And so that inherently is discriminatory.

Welcoming Family

Francis: If, one of my friends came up said their child was gay I'd say the first thing is, love your child, I mean, it doesn't make any difference if they're gay, or heterosexual, they're still your child and you need to love and support that kid.

Cheryl: The church that my son attends has a very strong LGBT group and so one summer, like two or three summers ago he was in charge of putting together a group to come up to the lake area that is near our home - like as a weekend retreat. So they were traveling up and he said, you know, could we maybe come to your house and have dinner on Saturday night? And so, we've always had a very welcoming home. We welcome everybody regardless of who they are, and so, we said well certainly you're more than welcome to bring them over. So he came with the group from church. There was probably like, maybe twenty of them and we just had a big barbeque in our backyard. I even think some of our family came down. We had a couple friends helped us put, you know, cook and get everything together. But, we just loved having- meeting his friends, they're like, they're part of his family, I mean he lives in New York now he's four hours from us so he has extended family he and we want to be a part of that we want to know who his friends are and, and want them to be welcome in our home just as anybody would be welcome in our home. And, so, no it's become like a tradition every summer when they come up to the lake area for a weekend retreat they come to our house on Saturday night for dinner and we've met some wonderful, wonderful people for dinner. They're like our kids coming home for the weekend, you know.

Francis: And we love to have them you know, it's great. I mean, to see them come up there. I said, our house, we've always like to entertain anyways and it's good to have these, the kids coming up and as of last year I said let's do a steak and bake, or a lobster and steak, which we did, it was great. I cooked twenty lobsters for them. We have a great time with them and, you know, course then they get into the Limoncello, that's another story, but it's great to have them. And we just love them all. If they're friends of Matthew's they're our friends.

Cheryl: One time we came down here to a function at the church, and then some of us went out afterwards and, we were all, we were, my husband and I were sitting there with all these, you know, people, LGBT people from the church, this gay, wonderful gay group of men and women, and one of the men came over to me and he said to me, you know, I, this makes me so happy to see you here with all of us talking. He goes, he was from Colombia I believe and he said, you know, I could never bring my mother to anything like this because she would never accept this. And I thought, it's gr- I felt very emotional kind of about that, because I kind of felt bad for him, that he couldn't have that relationship with his mother but at the same time I was very overwhelmed that he thought that was such a wonderful thing that we did and we wouldn't think anything about it. Because we want to be a part of this.

Francis: It's second nature to us. It's part, you know, it's not a big deal. You know we, we would expect to be there. We've always supported our kids.

Cheryl: I would hope that any parent regardless would want to support their child and love their child for who they were.

Matt: If you asked me when I was coming out to my parents as a twenty-two year old kid at that kitchen table, if ten years later I would be bringing a group of twenty gay friends, gay friends from Catholic Church in New York City back to my parents house for a barbeque, I would never have believed that, that would have been a possibility. If there are gay kids anywhere in the world who are struggling to accept their, their sexuality because they're concerned about what

their family's reaction will be, particularly the family's reaction related to their Catholicism or to their faith, I think it's so important for that kid to know, again, above all else, that, that kid is loved, that kid was made by God to be exactly who they are. There is nothing, nothing wrong with that kid and I think there are lots of different definitions of family. Family can be the people that you're born into, it can be a chosen family, but the family is one that accepts you and loves you, that treats you equally, and that, that loves you exactly who you are and fully for who you are. And all parts of who you are. And so if your biological family does not accept you, know that there is a greater family that does. And I think that's what the Catholic Church should provide that. The Catholic Church should be that family for someone who does not feel accepted. And it's in fact doing the opposite right now. And that's what the Catholic Church needs to return to.