

Today I passed as straight

By [Martha Spong](#)

April 1, 2015

Today, I passed as straight.

That's a weird thing to write, because in fact I passed for straight for most of my life, either because I hadn't thought yet about not being straight, or later because I *had* thought about it and just couldn't face what it might mean for my life.

Today I was getting a pedicure, and to be completely honest, it's not the first time I've let the women in that particular salon think my spouse is a pastor in town who happens to be a man.

We were talking about dogs, and I said we used to have a golden retriever, and the young woman doing my pedicure, who had figured out we are a blended family, asked, "Was it yours or his?"

Sometimes, no matter how hard I try to not have it be a thing, being queer is a thing. It's a truism of coming out that some of us don't "look" queer, and that means we have to [come out more often](#), because otherwise no one will know. I'm that gay, that lesbian, that queer. Just last week, I asked my hairdresser to queer me up, but I still look like somebody's mom, which is to say a person whose sexual orientation is not of particular interest to people, especially those younger than I am, whether they are gay or straight. This is true even in the gayest looking item of clothing I own (a \$4.99 black thermal hoodie from the clearance rack at Old Navy).

Our 10-year-old is filling a notebook with jokes, which reminded us of this one:

A father and son have a car accident and are both badly hurt. They are both taken to separate hospitals. When the boy is taken in for an operation, the surgeon says 'I cannot do the surgery because this is my son.' How is this possible?

The surgeon is his mother.

My spouse is my wife, and the golden retriever was hers.

Usually I can find a way to avoid the pronouns, but sometimes, and this was one of them, the pronouns will get you. And I'm sitting there with my pants folded up to my knees and one foot in soapy water and the other foot in the hands of a stranger with sharp tools, and I've got nowhere to hide.

"Was it yours or his?"

"His," I said, and even though we joke about how we are the Ward and June Cleaver of gay couples, and I'm June, I felt bad about it.

Most of my life has been lived with the benefit of massive privilege: white, raised reasonably well-off, well-educated, American, Protestant and, until I came out, straight-in-the-eyes-of-the-world and quite honestly in mine, too, for the majority of that time. Even before I came out to myself, when I was telling *myself* a story about my life, I could take for granted that talking about my family was safe.

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Today I couldn't do that, and I'll admit that the law passed in Indiana is on my mind. People I know are sharing articles and op-eds they think are smart, saying the real trouble is about liberal intolerance toward religion, or that marriage equality is okay with them but people should have the freedom to associate with who they like. I would ask them to consider that the effect of such a law is more than the specific and localized legal impact. It says to people, even in places where it is not the law, that gay people—and particularly married gay people—are an acceptable group to despise and avoid.

It gives permission to "other" people, which is a dangerous thing.

I would like to ask my straight friends to consider how they would feel about going into a restaurant, a barber shop, a clothing store, a yarn store (God forbid!), or a ball park and being refused service. I would like to ask my straight friends to imagine not feeling safe to answer the kind of passing question your dental hygienist or nail technician might ask.

Then think about me. Picture me and my family, going to the kinds of places your family goes, and not being safe because our kid has a mom and a step-mom. I am asking you to personalize this and picture us when you wonder if this law really hurts anyone.

That's why I didn't correct the young woman doing my pedicure this morning. That's why today I passed as straight.

Originally posted at [Reflectionary](#)