

Twainbow Defines What it Means to Live Under the Double Rainbow

By: Melissa Alvarez for The American Autism Association

The month of June is nationally recognized as Pride Month to commemorate the Stonewall Riots as well as the fight for equal rights for members of the LGBTQI+ community. The month is devoted to spreading awareness for the community and recognizing that there is still a long way to go for equality.

Within the community, many different identities coexist and intersect. The term “double rainbow” has come to signify the intersection of identities between the LGBTQI+ and ASD communities.

Twainbow is a non-profit organization that brings awareness to this double rainbow, both for people under it and on the outside. The organization offers resources for individuals under the double rainbow and creates a sense of community for queer people on the autism spectrum.

Corey Coloma is the Director of Operations and a Board Member of **Twainbow**. He also lives under the double rainbow. When he isn't working at **Twainbow**, Coloma works for a non-profit in Eugene, Oregon as a Direct Support Professional to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We asked him a few questions about his journey to discovering he lived under a double rainbow and his hopes for **Twainbow** in the future.

AAA: What inspired the creation of **Twainbow**?

CC: We wanted to bring awareness to the autistic segment of the LGBTQI+ community. **Twainbow** was formed to provide a clearinghouse of information regarding LGBT-ASD social support, the latest news, and research.

AAA: What motivated you to join **Twainbow**?

CC: I have many skills with graphic design and desktop publishing. I created the autism pride flag that was voted on in 2016. I have always thrived with my organizational skills doing things that others never thought of. I have a really incredible strength with my advanced perceptual reasoning skills to find solutions and problem solve. In life when no one else would lead I stood up and created the path. When others were overwhelmed I found a way and brought them through it. I've always had a mind for numbers and financials. When Louis, the founder, asked me if I would like to be a part of this new endeavor I knew that it was destined to be something great with all of us working together.

AAA: When did you realize you lived under a double rainbow?

CC: I knew from a very young age that I was attracted to men. I came out to my family around the age of twenty-one as a gay man. I didn't know I was autistic until about the age of 30 when I was diagnosed with Asperger's. I came out to friends and family on Facebook shortly after my diagnosis of Asperger's. I had never heard the term Asperger's before and then a friend of mine came out to me as being diagnosed with Asperger's. I began to research and realized how much it described me and then I took an online test that is linked to **Twainbow's** website. That's when I started my formal diagnosis process. You can read my story on our website.

AAA: How has living under a double rainbow affected the way you navigate the world?

CC: There is a lot of stigma for being a member of the LGBTQI+ community like myself that identifies as a Gay man and there has been even more since I came out as autistic. I never realized how much that was true until I disclosed that I am Autistic.

Many people have treated me like a substandard human like I'm less of a person because of it. Many people don't take the time to see my strengths and only notice my quirks and differences. I never imagined what it would be like until people started talking down to me and treating me badly. Many people found it hard to believe that I could drive or do other things that some autistic individuals haven't had the opportunity or have had difficulty with. I live alone and I manage coordinating four jobs as well as being on two other Board of Directors and being the director of **Twainbow** in charge of operations. I also manage the social media for **Twainbow** and one other organization as well as moderating our support group on Facebook. I am a chapter representative for my county in Oregon and I volunteer for an HIV and STI testing outreach program for men that have sex with men in my community in Oregon. Coordinating this is all possible because of technology like my Google Calendar. The drive and perseverance and abundant energy resources I have.

Neurotypicals often infer things through some manner of expression like body language or tone of voice that we do not always pick up on. A lot of autistic people have come to realize that neurotypicals don't say what they mean whereas many autistic people often speak very directly and leave nothing to interpretation. When communicating with people that don't say what they mean it often feels like a game of charades and can be very exhausting to go through on a daily basis. That's why many autistic individuals do not like the puzzle piece to represent us and find it very offensive when organizations use it.

Many autistic individuals feel that we are described as a mystery or that we are missing something when the puzzle piece is used, whether that was the intention or not that is how we feel. No one wants to live from the perspective of beginning as someone with a deficit. And because I am under the double rainbow I always bring awareness to subjects that concern me like this when I am able and advocate for my community.

People don't see what's going on with us. They expect us to be just like neurotypical (non-autistic) people because we have been deemed high functioning. The labels may isolate us and make us feel hopeless and misunderstood like I was, even though we are still very much autistic and having many different experiences of the world.

We also notice that many people take things very personally as if we are doing something to them and also we notice that they take things we say very negatively. We then build a function in our personality matrix to fit in and we will be negative or take things personally as means of blending in with society and "pretending to be normal" as the term may be used. We may respond to questions negatively as if we are under attack and not understand what is really being asked of us.

People expect us to communicate as they do but I don't communicate as they do. I often think of it as a 2-way mirror. I'm sitting in a room looking out and people are on the outside looking in but they can only see themselves in the mirror. They see us through their own perspective and have no understanding of us. I especially dislike functioning labels. They don't help us. They don't tell an accurate story. Someone may be deemed high functioning like I was and their struggles will go unnoticed. This term made me feel like less of a person instead of an equal.

All people can contribute to society if given the opportunity, no matter how big or small it may seem. When communicating with people that don't say what they mean it often feels like a game of charades and can be very exhausting to go through on a daily

basis. Others will be deemed low functioning and society will deem them unworthy of assistance and discard them and they will never reach their potential. People don't take the time to understand us and what we have to offer society. Many people don't yet realize all of the things famous autistic people have contributed to society.

I had to become a strong self-advocate and also advocate for others that haven't had the opportunity to shine as I have had. Just because I communicate in more analytical terms and don't always comprehend when someone is being sarcastic or other inflections of speech I have been shunned by many people. It is usually one of the first things people notice. Almost every time I tell someone that I am autistic they will try to test me over ninety percent of the time to see if I can detect sarcasm or if I display another stereotype of autistic characteristics. This occurs within twenty seconds of me telling them. Frequently they will do it again right after. People should accept that if we disclose we are autistic then it is true and not test us to see if they believe it or not.

Socializing is difficult when so many of the LGBTQI+ establishments for us like bars and clubs have sensory nightmares like smoke machines, loud music, so many smells, and so many people. It's great to have our online support group on Facebook because we can have a place to be ourselves without judgment. We can share articles, memes or anything else that connects us and find out there are other people going through the same things and know we are not alone.

Many gay men like nice attire and while that is true for me I need clothing that has the right sensory aspects. I wear different attire than most because of my sensory differences and people often give me harsh looks because of it. Once I find something that works I may purchase several items of the same design. This has caused a lot of stigmas in the gay community and elsewhere. Humanitarian efforts are very big with a lot of autistic individuals despite many people not realizing this and that is myself

included. I drive an economical Honda to help the environment. I try to think about the food I eat and what it will do to the future of this planet's ecosystem and make changes as needed. I moved into the city to be close to my work and reduce my commute to work. I like saving the resources of this planet and do not purchase new clothing frequently because of the comfort older clothing, have given me.

I am a very passionate and spontaneous person and this is in part to my attributes of ADHD. I have been known to plan and execute an entire trip on the fly. And I do this with the strengths that my characteristics of OCD provide for every detail.

As mentioned I am on two other Board of Directors in my state of residence. I wanted to bring my skills to even more people and help advocate for more individuals with what many people call disabilities but I like to think of them as different abilities. I am single but would love to find a man to build a life with. I have many talents and know I will make a great partner with the right match. It is hard to find someone that is understanding of my unique personality.

AAA: What resources are available to individuals with autism who are also LGBTQI+?

CC: We have a Facebook support group for individuals living under the double rainbow. Anyone with a resource they would like to share is welcome to submit it to us on our website. I have learned to love myself and I don't like ABA "therapies." I feel that they would be used to take away who I am as an autistic individual. I want to be accepted for who I am not for if I act like a neurotypical person.

AAA: What's the best thing about your organization, in your opinion?

CC: I think we have an amazing team that works well together and each person has skills that are unique unto themselves and we are looking to expand as well. Tony Rowe

is now our Board Chair and Louis Molnár is our Board Treasurer with myself, Corey Coloma, as the Board Secretary. I'm really proud of our team.

AAA: What's the best advice you can give to individuals with autism trying to understand their sexuality?

CC: I think that this one takes a while to understand for ourselves. I know I have taken a lot of time to discover my true self. I think we should all read stories and share experiences with one another and let us grow in our knowledge of who we each are. Then we can decide what labels feel right to us and when we want to share it with others. Or we can just be ourselves and know we all deserve love for the amazing people each of us is. Many individuals are tired of labels and want to be their true selves. I think the most important thing here is to love yourself for who you are and to keep yourself safe from harm in any manner of the meaning. We each have to decide what is right for us and when it is time.

AAA: What are your hopes for **Twainbow** in the future?

CC: I would like to see us receive our 501(c)3 so we have access to more grant opportunities and other ventures. This has been something in the works. I would like to see more people take the opportunity to purchase things from our shop and give feedback as to what they would like to see offered. I would love to see our organization grow with more board members and more diversity. We have had over eighteen thousand visitors from 89 countries since we released our new website. We have been featured in Gay Times magazine as well as other media outlets and we would love to have more opportunities for outreach. One dream I have had was to be on The Ellen DeGeneres Show to bring a larger awareness to our organization and increase our growth and scale. We'd like to invite the double-rainbow community to share with us what they would like to see from **Twainbow** in the future, and to also share their stories.

These will be included in future editions of our recently launched newsletter and on our website.

AAA: Thank you so much, Corey, for your time. We enjoyed hearing about your personal experience and journey. Thank you for sharing your story with our community and the resources available to them.

To keep up with **Twainbow**, subscribe to their newsletter, and more, visit their website:
<https://www.twainbow.org>

To join their Facebook Group, visit their Page: <https://www.facebook.com/Twainbow/>

Twainbow may also be reached via e-mail at: info@twainbow.org