

## Our stories: Pride 2020 - Alana Petraske

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**CATEGORY:**

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I grew up around the corner from the Stonewall Inn, in a Greenwich Village ( NYC) reeling from the AIDS crisis. After 19 great years in the UK, I now live here again. With the COVID19 public health crisis and the daily protests for racial justice happening here, I feel that this June we are closer than ever to the spirit of the original Pride, and the New York of my youth.

As an out lesbian in law firms over the past 15 years, I've had my fair share of awkward moments, but happily only a couple of outright bigotry. My approach early on was to keep my personal life very separate from work – I was 'out', but I kept much of myself to myself. I thought of this as having clear boundaries between work and home, but perhaps it was more a way for me to avoid awkwardness or confrontation. I also aspired to the role of 'trusted advisor' and worried that I might alienate my clients. Much has changed since those early days though – first UK civil partnership and then gay marriage in the US and the UK. Social norms across society have changed measurably, and representation in the media and in business has made it easier to navigate professional life. For me personally, I've also found that having a family has changed the dynamic somehow.

I'm privileged to work in the philanthropy and nonprofits space. Each day I get to support charities delivering their nonprofit mission, and families exploring the better uses of their wealth. I think frequently these days about the earliest nonprofits I came across as a kid – ACT UP!, GMHC, Housing Works, and how they met crisis head-on.

Over the past decade at Withers, I've really appreciated the many LGBTQ+ role models I've had – I have never had to worry that my sexuality or my gender would limit my success, seeing colleagues thrive and flourish across the firm.

While I am proud of where we have got to, this is not a time for complacency. Both in legal life, and in the nonprofit and foundation world, this is a time for honest reflection, for education and for action.

**Be proud. And kind. Happy Pride everyone.**

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