

Maamwi miinwaa gdaa'aami - Story Spotlight: Bernardo Morais

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My name is Bernardo Morais and I'm a student in the Social Service Worker program at Seneca College. I am also a Student Ambassador in the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. I'm proud of my trans identity and how I fought to live my most authentic life despite multiple challenges. Coming to terms with your own identity and coming out is never easy - it can make you scared, anxious and isolated and I'm no stranger to all of those feelings. It takes a lot of courage to understand that you were trapped in a life that wasn't yours, and even more courage to decide to pursue your own happiness and authenticity. In this process, you will likely find many barriers. These barriers may be bureaucratic, such as having to change paperwork, they might be medical (accessing healthcare while trans is hard, even in Canada!), they might be social and many more. They may also be personal, where you do not feel accepted among family and friends, or you may feel like an outsider for your identity or by individuals who go out of their way to give you a hard time because you are from the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

In my case, I didn't feel safe being trans and gay in my home country anymore, Brazil, due to growing political uncertainty and several setbacks in social rights. My home country is extremely important to me, and as much as it hurt me to make the decision to leave it, it just wasn't worth the constant danger of being openly queer in a society that was hostile to the 2SLGBTQ+ community. It breaks my heart to say that Brazil is one of the countries in the world with the largest number of homicides and suicides within the trans community, as 375 trans people were murdered in 2021.

On the other hand, and this is something that I like to remind myself when times get hard: there is also immense joy in being queer. I'm a big believer in joy as a form of resistance. Not only the inherent joy of being yourself, but also the belonging to a community, to meeting others like you and finding home in the most unexpected places. Home can be found in queer friendship and love, in unexpected allies and being in welcoming and inclusive places. As a queer newcomer, home for me is anywhere I can feel safe, embraced and included. A place where I can tell my story and be who I am.

Since moving to Canada to study, Seneca has been a huge part of my life and it also represents a place in which I am encouraged to be proud and open of who I am. It's a place in which so many people from different backgrounds come together, share experiences and learn together. I'm happy to have found home here!