

OUR PEOPLE

A story of constant progress

Anthony Colegrave discusses the ongoing journey towards greater inclusion for the LGBT+ community.



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Anthony Colegrave explains how decades of change have laid the foundations for greater freedom and inclusion for fellow members of the LGBT+ community.

London Partner Anthony Colegrave knew he was gay from an early age, but his journey to coming out was complicated by the fact he was born and raised in Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s.

It was a time and place where sharing your sexuality could lead to criminal charges or imprisonment, so Anthony was well aware of the risks he faced growing up.

He says: "I was brought up in a conservative family in Harare and it was a very loving household. I was lucky that some of my closest friends were gay, so we watched out for each other, but there was no freedom to express ourselves and we learnt not to be too overt, because any suspicion could get us in trouble."

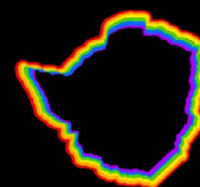
Things changed for the better for Anthony in the late 1990s when he moved to South Africa to attend university.

He says: "South Africa was so much more liberal. It was a wonderful and fascinating place to be in the 90s because of the end of apartheid and the advent of the constitutional protections which prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, gender and sexual orientation. There was a palpable sense of freedom and hope."

"I had a sense of freedom I'd never experienced in Zimbabwe, so I could be who I really was for the first time."

"Looking back, I'm glad I experienced the tough times. It makes me appreciate the sacrifices people made to bring change and deliver the kind of freedom we have today (at least in many countries), which is so easy to take for granted."

During those years, Anthony was lucky enough to witness some of the trailblazers who had the bravery to speak out against discrimination of all kinds, such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu.



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PARTNER, LONDON





Anthony and Brett in 2005



Anthony with friends circa 2009

With Brett in Australia in 2013

He says: "It's testimony to how far we've come but also a reminder that, in many countries around the world, people who identify as LGBT+ still live under strict legal regimes and persecution, so there is still a long way to go."

Anthony officially came out to his friends in his early 20s, but waited until he was 25 and in a relationship before telling his family.

He says: "For me, it was a lengthy coming out process. I always knew at a core level that I was gay, and I think my family probably knew as well but, once I'd come out to my friends while at university, it was almost like learning to breathe again – I had to process it and discover myself. I also wanted to be in a long-term relationship before I officially shared it with my parents who, as I expected, were extremely supportive, which meant a lot."

Anthony introduced his parents to his partner, Brett, who he met in Johannesburg in 2005. They married in 2013 and moved to the UK in 2016 where Anthony now works in the Firm's London office.

He says: "Throughout my legal career I've been lucky enough to always feel comfortable being who I am, starting when I was a trainee in South Africa. That said, as a young lawyer, being openly LGBT+ wasn't common and it was a case of 'if they don't ask, don't tell'."

"Since then, we've moved on from that sort of tacit acceptance to the idea of allyship and full equality."

"Things have definitely improved though and, when the opportunity came up to join the Firm, it was great to know that White & Case takes diversity so seriously (I wouldn't have wanted to join a firm that didn't)."

The presence of the Spectrum affinity group, which was started in the London office, is an illustration of that.



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Anthony says: "It's a network for everyone, whether you identify as LGBT+ or not and has been a great way to get to know people.

"There are lots of events people can attend, including the Pride brunch we held earlier in the year."

Anthony adds: "I've certainly found the London office to be very welcoming and open to dialogue. There is always room for improvement in any workplace, but I think the fact there is a completely open door to have discussions on LGBT+ related issues (such as gender neutral bathrooms) is a great sign of how seriously White & Case takes diversity and wants to do the right thing.

"The good thing is that I can now be totally upfront about who I am but it's understandable that, sometimes when people see my wedding ring, their first thought is usually 'wife' not 'husband.' I'm happy to correct them, without making it a big deal. Their reaction is from years of socialization, and it's changing all the time.

"Communication is so important and it's inevitable that sometimes people will be tongue tied or nervous about saying the wrong thing, but we're all learning together, and everyone makes mistakes. If in doubt, speak to a member of the Spectrum network (you'll find details on the intranet) or an ally who will be more than happy to help.

"We're all on a journey and things are changing so rapidly, but it's important to appreciate that, as a global firm, some of our people live in countries where legislation and culture still discriminates against members of the LGBT+ community. That's why it's important to offer the best possible support and build this sense of community while recognizing the sensitivities.

"As someone who grew up under those kinds of conditions, I know how lucky I am to work in an office and at a Firm where I'm free to be my full self. That's something I know we can't take for granted."



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