INTERSECTED

I am happy now. Content.
A 13-year relationship, 2 beautiful cats, a nice house (and not so nice mortgage), stable employment, and reasonably good health.

27 years ago I was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. The severity of my illness shaped a lot of my life from the age of 10. I felt lonely and isolated a lot, and would retreat into books and music alone in my room often. I had friends, but with Crohn's being not the most pleasant subject, I kept most of that side of myself, to myself.
My paediatric gastroenterologist wrote in a referral that I exhibited “selective mutism”. I remember at show and tell in reception, I would show and Mum would tell. The teacher gave us half a star each.

Another part I kept to myself was my queerness. A lot of the reason was self-preservation: there wasn't a lot of representation growing up in the Adelaide Hills in the 1990s to 2000s, and the reception to anyone outside of what was considered “normal” was generally negative.

I started dating my first girlfriend in 2009. She was the first person I brought home to meet my family, and I never really “came out” to them. I think by this stage my parents and sister already knew, so the reaction to “so-and-so is staying over tonight” was quite underwhelming.
I never truly felt comfortable talking about my illness with her. Who wants to talk about needing to run to the bathroom to pass (mostly) blood 13 times a day on a date?
That year I was hospitalised for a week during a flare-up. My girlfriend visited one afternoon and we were harassed by a nurse who said we were acting inappropriately, holding hands.
We broke up the next year. Apparently I didn't communicate enough.

In 2011 I met someone new, and we dated for about a year. This time, I shared a little more of myself and my Crohn’s diagnosis.
We spent most of our time together at her place, and even went on a trip to Melbourne for a couple of nights. When we returned home, I was unwell and had to rush home. She broke up with me that week.

I started dating my current partner in 2013, having met through friends. This time, I shared a lot more, and a lot sooner. We split our time between her place and mine.
After a year and a half, I asked her to move out together to escape a difficult home situation. We've lived together since, and she has supported me through everything from job changes to nursing me back from 5 surgeries, including having my colon removed and a permanent ileostomy formed.

I never thought I would find this kind of love, happiness and acceptance.

Since having surgery for a temporary, and then permanent ileostomy, my life has completely changed. I am finally able to live with minimal restrictions.
We have been able to travel far more than I ever dreamed possible. I have freedom to make plans without my health needing to be considered (apart from how many supplies to pack).

I am able to work long hours and overnight shifts in disability support, and my lived experience of disability has been beneficial in many instances.

I sometimes think back to my ten year old self, sitting in a hospital bed dreaming of a life I thought was out of my reach. I wish she knew life would get better one day, and that sharing parts of herself would deliver more than it cost.