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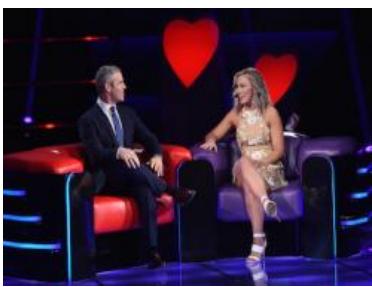


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Liz Baxter Raises Visibility as First Lesbian on 'Love Connection'

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
Sunday Aug 20, 2017

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Liz Baxter and Andy Cohen

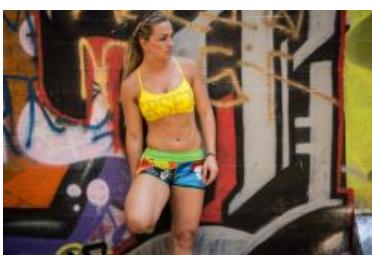
On July 27, Liz Baxter will make television history as the first-ever lesbian contestant on the game show "Love Connection." This traveling medical salesperson teamed up with openly gay host, Emmy Award winner Andy Cohen for the one-hour reboot of the original dating show that features singles searching for love in a series of three blind dates before dishing the dirt in front of a live studio audience.

Cohen reportedly approached Fox about opening the show to gay and lesbian singles, and they were excited to promote LGBTQ visibility. And Baxter was excited to be the first lesbian to find a "Love Connection" as part of her activist mission to inspire diversity and women's empowerment.

EDGE spoke with Baxter about her upcoming show, her move from Indiana to California, her search for love, her passion for travel, and her blog and vlog.

EDGE: I read on your blog that you discovered you were gay at 23, after you kissed a girl at a local gay bar and felt the 'butterflies' that you never got with men. But then you had to deal with internal homophobia. How did you finally take the plunge and trust that your friends and family would still support you?

Baxter: I think at a certain point you have to decide, is family important enough, are you going to allow yourself to be true around them? I had distanced myself from friends, and had to decide if I was going to distance myself from family. They were important to me because we're super close, and on some level I knew they wouldn't love me, but I wasn't sure how hard of a fight it would be, how much [pushback] I would get. And it was hard at first, but when I brought my first girlfriend around and they realized I was happy, that my life wasn't harder like every parent fears, they were.



(Source:Courtesy Liz Baxter)

EDGE: Can you share with those who might not have your courage how that felt?

Baxter: It's really an indescribable feeling. You're kind of allowing yourself to love yourself just the way you are. When you are out -- I called it self-loathing in my blog, but it's more that you're afraid of being yourself. You're gay and happy, but you don't want to tell other people. Once you're able to speak it out loud, you acknowledge to yourself it's okay. The most important thing in coming out is to be okay with yourself, to be confident, and know who your true self is. And the bottom line is, anyone who loves you is going to be supportive.

That's how it was for me; it felt amazing! Once I started telling everyone and they knew, I realized the fear and anticipation was harder than the actual process of coming out. It was a huge relief. Especially in small town America, you're not sure what you're going to be met with. But I still think everybody is more understanding than you think, if you approach it from being your true self.

EDGE: I also read your blog about manifesting the life that you wanted to lead -- studying abroad, moving from Indianapolis to California, changing careers, doing Crossfit -- and it all worked out great in the end.

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Baxter: I try to live day to day, but I'm also looking for every door that's open. Who knows who'll read this story and be inspired from it. I went into medical sales, now I'm blogging and into activism. You never know what door will open and where it will lead you. So I never stopped that positivity. We all want happiness, but I think that looks differently to different people. The most important thing is coming from a place of gratitude every day. Be happy with what you have, and more things will come to you. I make a gratitude list at the end of every day in my journal, because it's important to have that positive energy.



(Source:Courtesy Liz Baxter)

EDGE: I saw you recently went to Belize; tell readers a little about your passion for travel.

Baxter: Being vulnerable in a different culture is such an exciting feeling for me. You don't speak the language, you're at the mercy of other people, and you have to be humble. When you put yourself in that position, all you can do is learn. When you travel and allow yourself to be in that way, you can learn a lot about yourself. That's what life is about; learning and new experiences. Travel will always be a part of my life.

EDGE: Talking about new experiences, how does it feel to be the first LGBTQ contestant on "Love Connection"?

Baxter: It is kind of surreal, but also really exciting! So many people will be watching this show who may have never seen or know a lesbian. They may think they act or look a certain way, then all of a sudden they see people who are relatable, who look like their daughter or friend. It could change people's minds, broaden their horizons.

EDGE: Why is it important to have this network LGBTQ visibility happen?

Baxter: This is such a big show with Andy Cohen that's now moving to Fox. It's vulnerable to be on television talking about your dating and sexuality, but it's also empowering. I don't know who will watch it or feel courage, but I feel like they can relate. We have LGBTQ media, but I wonder if the mainstream population seeks that out. So it's important on network TV to accurately represent the entire population including LGBTQs, and it works toward normalizing it. There are so many different types of lesbians, and the more exposure we have, the more understood we are. It's so important for tolerance and understanding for people to see our faces and names, and be able to relate to us. When you're growing up and watching TV, you want to see people who are relatable to you. But for a long time, the mainstream media shied away from LGBTQs, thinking that what's normal is straight. Now we're seeing a little of everything.



(Source:Fox)

EDGE: What kind of love connection are you trying to make?

Baxter: You know, I am definitely looking for somebody funny, who I can laugh with. I want a partner who I can travel with, who is passionate about positivity and growing and changing together, with no set plan for life. I can't have everything laid out; I have to roll with it.

EDGE: How was it working with Andy Cohen?

Baxter: He was so nice! I don't watch a lot of his shows, but I knew he was funny and really sarcastic, so I was nervous. But he was super nice, and so excited to be a part of a show on FOX

that's going to share the love experiences of gay people just like everyone else, without making a really big deal of it. He took a moment at the beginning of the show to express how happy he was to be a part of a show so inclusive of the LGBTQ population.

Baxter's episode of "Love Connection" will be aired at 9 p.m EST on July 27 on the Fox Network.

For more information, visit www.yourfriendlyneighborhoodlesbian.com or www.fox.com/love-connection

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Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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