

'Guilt' of growing up gay

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I was in a completely different world. There was no parental control: only staff guidance in the form of suggestions. We were left to organize ourselves into intellectual sects. I was there for Natural Science, but I tended to stick with the "eccentrics." I was comfortable with them, and I felt included. A few of them had told me they were gay. I had never met a gay person before. These boys and girls were nice, soulful and seemingly set on a solid path. No deviants here.

Tucked away in a musty corner in the basement of the college library, I found a computer connected to the Internet. My research for "gay" turned up a number of things. Who knew there was a community for them all called gay.com?! Quickly and discreetly, I lapped up all the information I could, like a parched puppy after a long walk. I soon found my desired habitat in the form of furry bulky men they called bears. I became overloaded with content and imagery, and ducked away...there was something I had to do. This time, I did not ask for forgiveness, I did not question my motives...I knew I was gay.

Those six weeks at Governors' School were a cleansing period. I rarely called my mother, but I told my girlfriend I had attraction to men. She laughed and said it was ok, that she was bisexual herself. I told her I loved her and went and told my new friends that I was gay. Apparently, others had this same epiphany, and the group of eccentrics, now became a group of fledgling gays, nurtured by the few LGBT counselors at the camp.

Those six weeks were a rush for me. I had my first crush (a straight guy) and told a man I loved him for the first time (the straight guy). I did meet this furry little ginger gay, and with him I had my first intentionally homosexual experience. Coming out, against a historic Salem backdrop, it felt ethereal how happy I was. Mother had noticed a change, and as she rattled over the phone about how my thinking was getting too liberal, I knew I couldn't tell her I was gay. I opened the closet, went inside, and locked the door.

It felt like a lie.

I was told growing up, that living in deceit is poison to the soul; sin and lies will eat you alive. As a young adolescent boy, I thought my impure thoughts and the homosexual feelings were the sins and the lies. Trying to squelch my homosexuality never took away the gnawing feeling... I had no idea I was trying to rip my soul out, the very soul God gave me.

The last few years before adulthood were spent biding time. At 17, I moved out from my mother's and saw the world with my own eyes again. My father, a retired Air Force Master Sergeant, the man I had rejected in my youth, said horrible things to and spied on for my mother, took me in as a man. He told me I was free to grow on my own, that my mother had done enough to me to last a lifetime. He showed me trust, he showed me respect, and he showed me love. I came out to him when I was 19. He knew, and he didn't care. He loved me as his son. I am a daddy's boy because my daddy saved my life.

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I had escaped the fires of my youth. Each turbulent storm, each tear was exquisitely placed in God's plan to bring me to this point.

For the past four years I have been on "Religious Sabbatical." My relationship with God was strained, and I fell from any sort of path I knew to be on. I was hurt by His people. I was hurt by my mother. I was hurt by myself.

I could no longer claim to be a Southern Baptist...but it was all I knew. Growing up Christian, there is no other doctrine like your own. Baptists are especially exclusionary, we believed that our interpretation is the right one. I believed our interpretation was the right one.

However, I no longer believed homosexuality was a sin. And as for masturbation... the Bible is silent. Christianity is based on interpretation, custom, and family values passed down from congregation to congregation. You can't change the religion (nor can you change God), but you can change the congregation. Just think, shaving is a sin (Leviticus 21:5), but growing up all my pastors were beardless. Beard or no beard, I am a homosexual...and God loves me, even though I masturbate. A lot. ::

— *Nathan Stang is originally from Goldsboro, N.C., currently lives in Buffalo, N.Y., and is still on the hunt for decent Yankee BBQ. He blogs at buffawhat.com and is a contributor at Bilerico.com, where this piece originally appeared on Aug. 1, 2010. Reprinted with permission.*

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