

I Didn't Know My Girlfriend Came With a U-Haul

Unexpected Love, Tenderness and Being Queer in a Confused World

I am a straight male. My significant other is a queer female. This is our story.

Invariably, when the situation first comes to light with a given person, I get asked a question. The question is always worded differently: "How does that work?" "And she's with you?" "Doesn't that make her bi?"

My answer is usually the same. I rarely have enough time to explain the whole thing, so I'm glad to have that opportunity here.

I first met her at a party, almost exactly a year ago. We flirted, we hit it off and things went well that night. When I volunteered to drive home some various drunken people (I often don't drink at parties), she volunteered to keep me company. After I drove back to the party, we ended up sharing a couch to sleep that night and left in the morning with a promise to call each other.

Two days later we spent the afternoon together, wandering New York City. As evening got closer she sat me down on a bench in Battery Park and nervously faced me, announcing she had something to tell me.

I immediately thought the worst, thinking she had a boyfriend or didn't like me in that way. Through trembling lips she nervously managed to stammer out, "I'm queer."

I was a music major, I had lived with two gay roommates, one of whom was among my closest friends from college, and my last girlfriend had been at least bi-curious. What she told me was minor, insignificant even, to what I had feared. I looked at her and replied, "OK ... So?"

So my girlfriend is queer — what does that mean? It means she's faced a tougher life than a lot of us straight folk. She didn't ask to be gay, just like I didn't ask to be born with red hair. Most of us have experienced parental fears no larger than telling mom and dad that we failed a test or dented the car.

Imagine for just one moment how scary it is to tell your parents that you are gay. Imagine what their reactions might be. Imagine what your parents

would feel inside if you told them that. Forget about your family, what about the social stigma? Ignorant, mean people calling you "dyke" or "faggot" because you have a rainbow sticker on your backpack. People avoiding contact with you in some way as if you had the plague.

It gets a little better once you're out. You find support groups and you find friends who understand because they've been there themselves. Now think about how much trouble the average guy or girl has finding a date, then imagine how much harder it must be for a gay or lesbian. Again, I'm sure the friends and support groups help.

Now imagine having been out of the closet for a year and falling in love with someone of the opposite sex, someone whose gender you universally dismissed a year before. After spending a year getting close to your gay and les-

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bian friends, what would they think of you for returning to a "normal" relationship? Think about what it's like to come out of the closet and then go a step beyond that.

That's what it's like for her, but for me it's very different. I went through a questioning phase for a while, asking myself if it was me she liked or something she only saw glimpses of in me. I realized that was stupid. It's the same questioning I gave up worrying about in all my other relationships. I love her, plain and simple. From day one I decided to just let go and see what happened. A year later I'm very, very glad I did.

Doesn't that make her bi? If I decide to press the issue I will get her to admit that she is technically bisexual, but she is a person that does not like to use labels to describe a person. If labels were all people were about, we'd get cookie-

cutter people out of fictional character molds and that would really suck. When asked what she is, the answer will always be, "I'm queer." To the both of us that means the same thing: Different, but definitely not bad or wrong.

But people still ask me, "Why you? Why not a woman?" I've asked myself that question many times. I've asked her that many times. I've endangered our relationship many times because I've pressed for an answer to that question after getting one I could not and would not believe. The most basic answer I get from her is the one that makes the most sense now — we can't help who we fall for, just as we can't help if we are gay or straight. The complicated answer comes in the form of a quote from the movie "Chasing Amy":

Alyssa Jones: You know, I didn't just heed what I was taught, men and women should be together, it's the natural way, that kind of thing. I'm not with you because of what family, society, life tried to instill in me from day one. The way the world is, how seldom it is that you meet that one person who just *gets* you — it's so rare. My parents didn't really have it. There were no examples set for me in the world of male-female relationships. And to cut oneself off from finding that person, to immediately halve your options by eliminating the possibility of finding that one person within your own gender, that just seemed stupid to me. So I didn't. But then you came along. You, the one least likely. I mean, you were a guy.

Holden McNeil: Still am.

Alyssa Jones: And while I was falling for you I put a ceiling on that, because you *were* a guy. Until I remembered why I opened the door to women in the first place: to not limit the likelihood of finding that one person who'd complement me so completely. So here we are. I was thorough when I looked for you. And I feel justified lying in your arms, 'cause I got here on my own terms, and I have no question there was some place I didn't look. And for me that makes all the difference.

I just hope I handle things a bit better than Holden did in the end.