

Borderlands: Being Gay and Christian

By Bradley Lloyd (written in 2000)

I am 21 years of age, and gay. I am also a 'born-again' Christian, and have been for the last 14 years. At first I thought that being gay and a Christian were two things that were never meant to go together, but now I am just *very* confused.

...At the same time, I do not want to stop being a Christian because I've been one for so long, and it is important to me. Having said this, I am finding my church life very hard going at present; I feel that it would be easier if I 'came out' and was honest, because I'm living a double life and it's killing me! (Gill 112)

That isn't my letter, but it very well could be--only I'm 23, and don't really follow the whole practice of being "born-again" per say, since I'm a Lutheran from Wisconsin (Wisconsin Synod Lutheran, to be precise).

Before I even knew what sex was, I knew I was attracted to men. I don't know if I was born that way. I don't know if my experiences and experimentation at a very early age predisposed me to it. When I was four or five, I did engage in some very juvenile sexual experimentation ("I'll show you mine if you show me yours") with an older boy whom I really admired. I know that I continued this behavior with other guys I knew. But I also know that these sorts of experiences aren't abnormal (Jones 20-21). I don't understand how or why some guys could have my same exact experiences and be straight. Did I choose this? Is it placed on me? Is it something for me to embrace? Celebrate? It was especially confusing to me growing up in a conservative Lutheran church where homosexuality is declared a sin and, more importantly, where questioning voices that may dare to dissent are not yet allowed.

I come from a very religious family. My grandfather was not only a pastor, but was the district pastor for all of the churches in a statewide area. My other grandfather was a teacher at a seminary. Four of my uncles are pastors. My grandmothers are both Christian day school teachers, as are two of my uncles and an aunt. Entering the ministry is a tradition in my family, not broken until my mom and dad went to a “secular” college and my dad became an attorney. Even now, my sister is training to be a Christian teacher, and I’m teaching at a Christian college.

And, I’m happy to say, I am a Christian myself.

I have a very loving family, and yet I’m compelled to live a life of secrecy. At times I feel as though the Word and church on which we stand together as a strong family unit is the same Word and church that could break me apart from them. To blame God’s Word for such a rift seems almost heretical. Of course, neither my family nor I would fault the Bible. Instead, they would fault me and my actions and choices for breaking the family apart; I might fault them and their lack of love and acceptance for driving me first into secrecy and perhaps someday away from them. Ironically, we would both be using the Bible as a foundation for our viewpoints. It’s one thing for Christians to converse and often argue over varying interpretations of the Bible. But why must differing views break us apart on every level? Why can’t I look upon God’s Word as the common ground that will keep my family together?

My whole life seems to have been a search for freedom. Every time I read the Bible, I find myself looking for the door--the one final answer that will set me free, that will finally let me know, one way or the other. I haven’t found it. I don’t claim to have all the answers. I’m often confused by God’s Word, in varying turns elated and disturbed by it. My homosexuality for me has long been a moral dilemma. For my family and my church, there is no dilemma. I’m

sinning. For many gays and lesbians, there is no dilemma. I need to cast off my guilt and celebrate. It's all there in black and white, written on the Pauline page for everyone to see. And yet not everyone sees it the same way. These are the borders I traverse.

I could spend a long time arguing over biblical interpretations of certain passages. Some would credit me for it, others would fault me for it, and some would find it completely irrelevant. So, instead, I'm just going to tell you about my life thus far--the things I've been faced with and the choices that I've made, the things that have hurt me and the lessons that I've learned. In looking at theology, I don't think people will ever agree. I've looked at a lot of conflicting biblical interpretations on the issue of homosexuality. Maybe it's good that people don't agree. But in telling and reading our stories, perhaps we can at least come to an understanding of the forces and choices that work to shape our individual experiences. We can learn how we can better respond to others—as fellow human beings, as individuals, and as Christians. In this way, people on both sides of the issue can break the overwhelming, stifling silence.

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“Even though I was only five at the time, I knew not to talk about my experience (‘good little boys don’t . . .’)--in fact, my sense of having done something wrong probably tinged my experience with the exciting overlay of the forbidden. Of course, no one had specifically warned me about homosexuality. How many parents talk about any kind of sex with their preschoolers?” (Arterburn, 44)

As I said earlier, I'm not sure to what degree my early experiences contribute to my present sexuality. But I do know that I wish I had talked about it with someone. I didn't understand what was happening to me, what my desires were, let alone what they meant. I don't

remember when I was taught that homosexuality was wrong. What I do remember is hoping it would go away, and believing that it would.

When I was just a child, I remember thinking, “This is no big deal. Once I hit puberty, this should go away.” When puberty reared its ugly head, and “it” still wasn’t gone, I continued telling myself, “This is just a phase.” Over the years, these lines of logic began to become more urgent.

“I’ll outgrow this.”

“I just haven’t met the right woman yet.”

“God will heal me.”

“God may not heal me, but He’ll give me the strength to endure it.”

“I’ll live a celibate life.”

Through all this, there was one quiet question that has at times been a scared whisper, a confounded plea, and angry yell, a fervent prayer: “Why must I be alone?”

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From other narratives I’ve read, it seems like gay Christians in my position (the closet) don’t come out, they’re found out, at least initially. In her book, *Where Does a Mother go to Resign*, Barbara Johnson describes just such a situation, happening upon some gay porn in her son’s desk drawers. I experienced a very similar situation.

It was my dad that discovered me. I was 20 years old, just finishing my sophomore year of college. I had been looking up gay pornography on the Internet, unaware that my every move was being recorded in the history folder of the web browser on our home computer. The Internet was my first opportunity to experience anything homosexual.

Looking back at it now, I'm very thankful that I was "caught," because I've talked to many other closeted homosexuals, via the Internet, who first sought to come to terms with their sexuality through pornography. However, through exploring such sites, they began hooking up with other men for secret meetings. While this was never my intention, and I don't believe that I would have chosen that path, I can see how loneliness and confusion would lead others to risky, sporadic sexual behavior. When something is kept inside you for so long, and nobody knows about it, it screams for an outlet—any available one. I don't think sex is the bigger part of it. You just want to make a connection.

Dad had actually known about what I was doing for a few weeks, but believed that I was merely curious. When the same sites began appearing week after week, he realized that it wasn't just a passing curiosity.

I still remember walking into his office, where the computer was kept, and seeing him looking at a site from *Focus on the Family* discussing homosexuality and the Bible, detailing how it was a sin against God. I can try to describe the feeling, but I know it won't match the reality I experienced. It seemed as though abnormally strong gravitational forces were sucking me down into the center of the earth. My insides were gone in an instant. When I saw him looking at that webpage, I knew that he knew.

He saw me come in, and said, simply, "There's something that I want to talk to you about."

"I know," I said. The inevitable moment had come, and I was ready to carry it out to conclusion.

The first thing he did was to apologize. He said he was sorry for not knowing before. He

described to me certain instances, where, in retrospect, he could see that I was reaching out for help--wanting to tell this "secret" that I carried with me. I don't even remember these instances, partly because in my mind, there were so many of them--so many times that I had wanted to say something but didn't. He said he was sorry for the difficult life I had led thus far.

He asked me how long this had been going on, and I told him that it had been with me for as long as I could remember.

And I was able to tell him about how difficult it was. For the first time, I told someone about how scared I was in the high school locker room. Scared that I would be discovered, accused of looking at someone, and, heaven forbid, get an erection. I could finally tell someone why I avoided all high school athletics, and how I was afraid of what might happen when I visited the doctor's office. I could finally tell someone why I hadn't ever seriously dated, and how it hurt me terribly when people would inquire why I wasn't with anyone. My dad listened. I could tell he was very uncomfortable, but he listened.

I remember he asked me, "Well, are you at least bisexual? Are you attracted to women at all?"

I don't remember how I responded: with an "I think so," or "oh, sure" or perhaps a feeble "uh-huh." I was telling the truth. I did and do find women attractive, but I didn't feel like I could explain how I was not at all sexually attracted to women. I didn't understand it then. How could I put words to it?

He said he loved me. He said he didn't understand it, but that the Bible said homosexuality was wrong and a sin. He told me to read the webpages he had selected (pages I returned to in writing this paper). He told me that I had a tough life ahead of me, but that God

had a plan for me. He asked me who else knew; but he was the only one. He told me that I didn't have to tell my mother. I said I didn't care if she knew, that I didn't care who knew--but he said he would tell her if she needed to be told. He said that this was something we should talk about occasionally. Not often, but occasionally.

That was over three years ago. We haven't talked about it since.

I don't know what to make of that. For a long while, it really bothered me. Had he told my mom? When she asked me if there were any nice girls at school, what was she really implying? Was he so deeply ashamed of me--so uncomfortable--that he couldn't bring himself to talk to his own son? Was he like the father in Johnson's book, thinking that it was just a phase that I would pass through (22)? Did he think I was over it? Or, was this permission to act as I wished within reason, as long as I didn't hurt or shame the family? Was this his way of saying that he couldn't give me the answers . . . that I'd have to find my own? How do you interpret silence?

Silence seems to be an overarching theme in my life.

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Larry's picture was still up on the piano where it had been since he left. I had turned it around for several months because I couldn't bear to look at it and wonder where he was. But it was dusted off, and I knew that when he came in the door and saw his picture in its usual place on the piano, it would signal to him that he was still our son--still loved, still accepted, still part of the family. (Johnson 119)

. . . I couldn't help feeling as if you were taking some very deliberate steps to hurt me. I understand that you were busy with work, but why did it take you four weeks to return my phone calls? And then, tonight, when I realized that you didn't have my picture up, you said something like, 'I was wondering when you would notice that'--as if you had intended me to notice all along. (Me, via e-mail, to my best friend, Rebecca, name changed)

That summer, I began to become a little more comfortable with who I was. Thankfully, I had never tried to convince myself that I wasn't a homosexual. I may have tried to reason it away, or I may have longed for something different, but I've had the blessing of always knowing that I was attracted to men. In that sense, there was no discovery for me. I always knew.

Because of this, I reasoned that I should no longer hide the truth from those that meant the most to me. I wasn't ready to tell my family, but I wanted to tell my friends. It seemed safest to start with my best friend, Rebecca.

Rebecca had been my best friend since our first year of Lutheran high school. We had a similar sense of humor and similar interests. We got along great. Maybe we sensed, even early on, that we were both, in some way, outsiders. She had a tough life, and she would tell me about how hard she had it. At times, I felt guilty. She would be disclosing her family secrets, but I would never tell her mine. She always felt like I had the perfect life, and I couldn't tell her how untrue that was. After the encounter with my dad, I knew it was time to tell her, and I knew our friendship could withstand it.

But how does one go about telling? Do you just blurt it out? I didn't really know how to

introduce it into the conversation. So, one night, while we were talking, I told her we'd play a game. It was called, "What's the one thing about you that the other person doesn't know about that you really want them to know?"

This game was supposed to be about me, but I could tell by her shy smile that something came to her mind immediately--and all of the sudden I knew what it was. She was in love with me. I had known she'd been interested with me in high school, but I thought it had passed. I was always honest in my intentions. I told her she was like my sister--a great friend--but not a girlfriend. I told her reasons why we wouldn't be good together: she didn't like kids, I did. She was very independent, our friendly arguments would take on new meaning. But I had never told her the real reason—that I was gay. At first, I was taken aback, but I figured this would be a good opportunity to give her the real explanation which, after six years, she surely deserved.

"I think I know what yours is," I told her. "You like me, don't you?"

"Yeah," she replied.

"Do you know what mine is?"

"You're gay?" I don't think she was joking. I think she really did suspect. I'd been more frank with her than anyone else.

"Yeah," I said.

I told her that that was why we were never a couple, and she told me that it didn't matter that I was gay; she thought it was wrong, of course, but she wouldn't not be my friend because of it. In fact, she even jokingly suggested hooking me up with her friend Mike, who she also thought might be gay.

However, looking back on our exchanges over the last three years, I can see how she

never really did accept it.

Unlike my dad, Rebecca and I would talk about my feelings. Once, I told her that I didn't think I could ever be in a life-long sexual relationship with a woman. I just didn't desire women sexually. Her reply to me was, "You know, I think I want someone like that. I don't want to have sex very often." At the time, I shrugged it off. She couldn't still be in love with me—not after she knew that I was attracted to men. After all, she'd had several boyfriends since I "came out" to her. Now, I think I see what she was really saying. She was still waiting for me. I thought honesty would solve the problem. It didn't. Or, maybe I wasn't honest enough. There were signals that indicated she thought my homosexuality was a passing curiosity, and I wasn't yet secure enough to assert the real truth.

Six months ago—two-and-a-half years after the summer I first came out to her—I told Rebecca that I had met someone that I was excited about. I told her about how cool he was, how we had a lot in common, how uncanny circumstances had brought us together. She had shared a lot with me about her love life, and I thought it apropos that I could finally share mine with her. I didn't believe for a second that she would look down on me because of it. I didn't expect her to necessarily agree with everything I did—I wasn't expecting her blessing or anything. While I knew she still had moral issues with homosexuality, she also had other gay friends. And, she had known about me for several years now, and we had talked about it! I knew I could go to her. At least, I thought I knew.

We were chatting via computer one night after I had returned from a New Year's trip to Seattle where I had visited my boyfriend, Jason. I told her the revelation I had had. I was in love with Jason. I still have that chat saved. There was a pause, and then she said, "Oh. Gee that's

great. I have to go now. Bye.” I e-mailed her, asking for an explanation. All she told me was that she was very angry with me. I asked her why. She said that I should know why--that what I was doing was wrong. For two months, she wouldn't return my phone calls.

For two months, I had no best friend.

When I finally cornered her into getting together, everything stayed beneath the surface. I could tell she was still angry with me. She had asked for a large picture of me for Christmas, and I had given it to her. When I went in her room, I noticed that all the pictures of me were gone. I wanted to know why, and yet I didn't want a confrontation. So, once again, I stayed silent.

The silence didn't sit well with me, though. I thought that if I wanted to avoid a verbal confrontation, I should at least write down my thoughts and let her know how I felt. I was deeply hurt. It didn't make sense to me. Why wouldn't she tell me why she wasn't speaking to me? Why wouldn't she tell me why she had taken my pictures down? I do realize that she may still have been (still is?) in love with me. I could understand her being hurt. In an e-mail, I told her that it was OK for her to be hurt and angry with me. But I also wanted to understand why. When she e-mailed me back, she wouldn't tell me why. She gave her same old refrain of “I'm mad at you. What you are doing is wrong.” I sent her another e-mail. I asked her to explain to me just what it was that I was doing wrong. I wanted to know what she thought, and clarify the real issues. I wanted a dialog. I was hoping we could resolve it together. Again, I told her that it was OK for her to be mad. I wouldn't come over again until she was ready--until she put my picture up. I told her that when she was ready to talk, she should call me.

She never replied. I sent the e-mail again, just to make sure she had gotten it. She sent one back saying, simply, that she had.

That was over two months ago.

It's been five months since I've had a best friend. In one week, I'll be leaving for Seattle to spend the summer with Jason. The silence between Rebecca and I will stretch across half the nation.

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My family has always been so important to me that I reasoned that they must always have had some clue. And, precisely because they were so important to me, I always told myself that when the question arose, I'd answer it truthfully. I wasn't going to actively burden them with the truth, but when they were ready to ask, I'd give it to them. It's a scenario that I played over in my head numerous times. My mom or my sister would be pressing me about when I would finally get a girlfriend, or how long it would be until they were a grandmother or an aunt. In some such conversation, I figured that they'd finally voice their suspicions and the truth would at last come out: "Brad, are you gay?"

"Yes," I would solemnly reply.

But that's not the way it happened.

I had just come home for Christmas. We had a very nice meal, all of us together for the first time in many weeks: Mom, Dad, and my younger siblings Jenny, Julie and Tom. Jenny had been away at college where she was in a program to become a Christian day school teacher. Since we had not seen each other in some time, we went into the living room, which was newly decorated for Christmas with stockings, garland and flashing Christmas lights. We could still see and hear everyone else in the adjacent kitchen—laughing, joking, cleaning up. Norman Rockwell couldn't have painted a prettier picture.

I don't remember the words that preceded it. I'm sure we were talking about my upcoming trip to Seattle for New Years. I had probably mentioned Jason in some sort of capacity or another, and then it happened. She lowered her voice, and looked at me, in a half-smiling yet subversively serious way: "Brad, are you being gay with him?"

I couldn't believe it. "*That's not the right question!*" I wanted to say. It wasn't supposed to happen like this—not those words, and not with everyone around all at once, laughing and having a good time.

I felt robbed, and cornered, but the truth bore too many consequences, and so I took what was to be my grand moment and turned it into another lie, and even smiled myself: "No, don't be silly, of course not,"—or some other such nonsense. They were empty words that only compounded the real silence.

At first, I was mad that she had to wait until I had found someone that I really liked before she finally asked me that question. I knew if she thought of me in terms of being with someone, she might have the same reaction as Barbara Johnson describes in her book, when she first discovered her son was gay: "Thinking of him entwined with some other male brought heaves of heavy sobbing from deep wounds of agony," (10).

It wasn't until later that I really thought about what Jenny had chosen to say, and why she had chosen to say it that way. Her exact wording reveals a stunning deliberateness. I could no better summarize my family's stance on homosexuality than with those words, "Brad, are you being gay?" I wouldn't be afforded the opportunity to *be* gay; only take on the outward actions of homosexuality. They weren't going to ask me about who I was, they weren't going to ask me my question—"Brad, are you gay?" Instead, it would always be, "Brad, are you being gay?"

I don't know why I was so surprised. Growing up in a strict Lutheran church, being raised in a very devout family and attending private religious school all my life, this is indeed the question I should have been anticipating.

And this is still the dilemma I face with my family. To tell them the truth seems almost selfish. Because they hold to the belief that homosexuality is a particularly damnable sin, my disclosure means their pain—their pain in examining where they went wrong, they're pain in believing that their son or brother, who was "being gay," might have to endure eternal torment. That concept of hell sounds almost ridiculous on paper, but what scares me is that it would be their reality. In their eyes, I might fit into Harold Brunson's description of the homosexual.

Brunson declares that the homosexual is someone related to:

Dehumanization, disease, or death: an unclean animal carcass, a human cadaver, consumption of a dead animal forbidden by dietary law, human afterbirth, menstrual blood, dead semen, slain but unkosher animals, and the seduced and dying leper. Like these dead, dying or deadly entities declared unclean by Mosaic law, God's word also declared homosexuality to be a deadly form of uncleanliness which corresponds exactly to these forms of uncleanliness throughout the Septuagint. God has abandoned homosexuals to their dehumanizing practices; to moral, spiritual, and yes, even physical disease; and apart from His grace, to death. (34)

And, as if that weren't enough, Brunson goes on to state that:

We can see the blazing homosexual fire in mass murderers like Jeffrey Dahmer and Wayne Gacy. In such barbaric examples we behold the grossest violations of

natural sexuality, when burning, savage passions flame out into almost unspeakable acts which “dishonor” and “deform” the human body, including tortuous sadomasochism, homicide (“homo”-cide), mutilation, cannibalism, and necrophilia. (46)

I can imagine some of my readers laughing off this description, and yet it would likely bear an element of truth to my family. As such, while it is not precisely my reality, it is still a reality I have to deal with. And even though it is not quite my reality, it is one that I cannot shake.

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I’ve wrestled with my homosexuality from a spiritual standpoint my whole life. For a long time, I thought that God could change me. I still do, too. God can do anything. Faith can move mountains. But when was the last time you saw a mountain move? God can do anything, and I think He does move some of our mountains . . . but sometimes He chooses not to. That’s the reality I have to deal with. What does that mean for me? That’s something I think about every single day.

In many respects, I look upon my homosexuality as a gift. To hate my homosexuality would be like hating myself. Without it, I would be a completely different person. Completely! My whole life experience would be different. I really like who I am. I feel like I have such a unique perspective. As Christian de la Huerta states in his book *Coming Out Spiritually*, “The challenges of my spiritual journey have strengthened me and heightened my perception of life, the benefits of which I often share with friends” (15).

While I haven’t verbally shared these benefits much (until now), I think that my insight

has been a positive influence in my family and for myself. From very early on, I felt that I would probably never live the straight life. I would probably never have a family. I'd never have children. So, I decided—in grade school already!—that I would take full advantage of being the oldest in my family. I think that's why God made me the big brother.

In watching my siblings grow, and in trying to be an active part of their lives, I've had an incredible array of experiences that I wouldn't trade for anything. Throughout grade school, high school and college, I made a very conscious effort to be there for them. In high school, I made all the sports road trips. In college, I would come home almost every weekend to spend time with them. I'd even skip class and drive two hours just to catch their games. I'll never forget the exhilaration of watching Jenny win the conference championship in volleyball. I'll never forget the nervousness I had watching Julie calmly sink two clutch free throws in the state semi-final basketball tournament. I'll never forget the pride I had when Tom's half-court, game-winning shot went in at the buzzer. How many people take the time and effort to enjoy these moments in the lives of their siblings? I've really been blessed.

And, I continue to be blessed with strong relationships. It seems that when some friends decide to leave your life, others are quick to fill in for them until they return. In the last year, I've told two of my close, Christian friends about my homosexuality, and they've not only listened to me, but the disclosure has actually strengthened our friendship. They don't always agree with the choices I've made, but they won't stop talking to me simply because of our different perspectives. Hopefully, it will be the same with my family.

I'm not so certain about my church, however. I know that if it were discovered that I have a boyfriend, I would likely be excommunicated. I have many conflicting thoughts about this. On

the one hand, perhaps it would be for the best. If my notions of what God says is right and wrong don't match up with my church's, then perhaps I'm better off else where. I'm not ready for that yet, though. And, in some respects, the church might be right. I can't say that I've made all the right choices. I still have a lot of questions. But I trust in God and His mercy to carry me. Why can't they trust that, too? I don't claim to be right. I don't claim to be perfect. But I feel like I'm doing the best that I can.

The same goes for my job at the Christian college. The administration there fired a gay professor a few years ago. I had had this professor for several classes as a student. He was not only an outstanding professor, but also a great spiritual leader on campus. He led mission trips to other parts of the country. He served the campus and the church well. But because he wasn't perfect, they decided to fire him? Because I'm not perfect—and admittedly so—I face the same risk?

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Some people wonder how you can be both gay and a Christian. I found a good example on Gay Christian Online, in a the response to a letter entitled, "Being Gay is Wrong." If indeed you think it is wrong, "then it is equally as possible for a homosexual to be a Christian as it is for a glutton to be a Christian." Coming from Wisconsin, one of the more obese states in the nation, I guarantee you that there's a lot of gluttonous Christians out there ☺ So why, then, is homosexuality looked down upon so severely?

Frankly, I don't understand this policy. While I may come out to friends and family, I can pretty much guarantee that I won't be coming out to my church. Sometimes it really makes me afraid. Other times I get pretty angry. It doesn't make sense. From my perspective, it often seems

as if my church is only interested in serving the righteous. Why do they make it so hard for me to be honest? I have no chance of opening a dialog within my church. I feel like I have to lie, or I have a lot to lose: my cultural home, my job, relations with my church-going friends and, especially, my family—immediate and extended—all involved devoutly in the same church.

Not only am I scared of what I would lose, but also what my family members might lose as well. How would the church view them, knowing they have a gay son, or a gay brother? As Chris Rice relates in *Sojourners Magazine*:

It is fear, not love, that is the greater force in the Christian debate on homosexuality. The fear of telling fellow church members, “I am attracted to the same sex.” The fear of saying you have friends who are gays and lesbians, who live with partners who are also your friends. The fear in telling a friend, “I love and respect you, but I cannot agree with your gay lifestyle.” Some of my friends fear losing their jobs in evangelical institutions if they voiced their honest questions. (2)

All I really want is to be able to talk openly about my experiences, to engage in a dialog and know that people will listen to my words. In her article “How to Discuss Moral Issues Surrounding Homosexuality When You Know You Are Right,” Nancy Duff examines three reasons why we should listen to opposing points of view, even when we know that our position is the correct one. First, “because we are fallible, if we silence an opposing opinion we may indeed be silencing the truth.” Second, “if the opposing opinion is clearly in error, it may contain a portion of the truth.” Third, “Even if the opinion we hold is not only true, but represents the whole truth, it risks becoming no more than prejudice or recitation if it refuses to be in

conversation with other opinions.” (146-147) All my life, I’ve been silent before my church.

Because of this, I think they’re missing some sort of truth.

No matter which side you are on—whether you believe that homosexuality is wrong or whether it is a valid lifestyle—I think the Christian church has a long way to go in serving people like me. There’s a silent and invisible community of people who are not only being overlooked, but often looked down upon. There’s a lot of closeted gay Christians looking for human contact, for real connections, and for love.

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In preparing this paper, I looked to the one community where people like me can speak out without fear of discovery: the Internet. I don’t spend much time on the internet, but even in the few weekend hours that I have spent chatting, I’ve had the opportunity to meet a lot of closeted people—even more closeted than I am. I asked them for their stories, and got a variety of responses, but one in particular stuck out. TJ has never told anyone that he is gay. This is what he told me:

I have a story about this guy that I’ve met on the Internet. I’ve really gotten along with this guy and find it always interesting talking with him. Yes, to a certain extent I have a crush on him. But you also have to realize that I haven’t had a relationship before so by having a crush on him it’s safe and anonymous. I’ve thought of us meeting and really hitting it off. But at the same time I realize he is involved and I respect that. I still wouldn’t mind talking with him on the phone, yet he is very protective of his privacy. Which is OK ☺ Hopefully soon!

What is striking to me about TJ’s story is that he is talking about me. It saddens me that some

people are so alone that they'll reach out—across a thousand miles through the Internet— for people that they barely know, simply because they finally find someone who is willing to listen to them.

Thus far, I've been somewhat critical of the church in their relations with people like TJ and myself, but in all fairness, I'm not sure the gay community has met our needs, either. I visited many websites in preparing this paper, and looked at a multitude of gay Christian testimonies. Most of them bore a resemblance to James's narrative, "20 Years of Torment and Half of a Second to Resolve." James says:

I kept hearing this question in my mind, over and over—"Why do my Christian friends have no problem accepting that they are gay, but I've been through twenty years of torture over it?" I finally put down my work and asked God that same question. It only takes a second, or part of one, to see a revelation from God in your mind and all the knowledge is there right away! Twenty years I struggled to see it and it took half of a second to solve the thing that had me bound all my life!

According to James, I would probably still be in the "thing" that kept him bound all his life. I'm extremely happy for James, and others like him. But at the same time, I think that my narrative would not be accepted on many of those websites, nor would it be accepted in more popular gay and lesbian publications. What took a half-second for James may take me years, or a lifetime. I think I will always have doubts about my sexual orientation. So why can't I be honest about this? Why must these doubts be viewed as dangerous by many other gays and lesbians? Is it not more dangerous to silence them? Won't this just continue the trend of silence, but to another extreme?

* * *

I guess this brings me to Jason and I. I think I saved this for last because it's the most difficult for me to talk about--mostly because I now have to look at everything I've said and relate it to my present relationship. My status as a semi-closeted gay Christian certainly has a great bearing on the relationship I'm currently in. It scares me a little bit, because sometimes I feel like it becomes a burden on him. My silence can't just be my own—he inevitably ends up sharing it, too, along with all my insecurities.

Now that there's a few paragraphs between my implication of physically meeting people over the Internet, I'm hoping it's safer to mention that I did, indeed, meet Jason over the Internet. I always feel as though I'm saying something seedy—or something that will be perceived as seedy—when I reveal that. But I'm going to break the silence, and describe the extraordinary circumstances that brought us together.

I certainly never set out to meet anyone online. I don't really think that's wise. But I'd like to call Jason my one exception to that rule. We participated in the same online movie group. After a while, we found ourselves discussing and defending the same movies. This led to more on-line interaction, and a discovery that our tastes were very much the same. We posted to the discussion for a year before I discovered that we had connections to the same, small, rural Wisconsin town—only he had been displaced to Seattle. The “it's a small world” coincidence was too great, so I decided to drop him an e-mail. We e-mailed back and forth for six months before I gave him my phone number. I didn't even expect him to call, but he did. We talked for several weeks before I revealed to him that I was gay. When, a couple months later, a chance business trip brought him into town, we decided to meet.

The choice to be romantically involved with him, for me, was not an easy one. However,

it was a very conscious choice on my part. I had been communicating with him and getting to know him for over two years. Not only was Jason a great guy who was close to my age, but I decided that I was tired of being alone. I wanted to experience what everyone else got to experience. I was 22, and I had never even held someone's hand until I held his.

I realize that I'm opening myself up to a lot of skepticism here. There's a lot of confounding variables in any relationship, let alone a gay one, let alone one between and out Moravian and a semi-closeted Lutheran who met over the Internet--plus you have to factor in the distance between Wisconsin and Seattle, add in the fact that it was my first relationship, and divide by any associated guilt on my part.

I still wonder if it was my insecurity and semi-closetedness that led me to get involved not only via Internet connections, but also in a long distance relationship. To a degree, perhaps it is safer, and people have asked me if that is why I did it. There's a degree of truth in it. Jason is far away from my home, my family, and my friends, so my "lives" have less of a chance of intersecting . . . and colliding. At least, that is the way it would seem; but as my sister's earlier questioning shows, that's really not reality. Trips to Seattle for Christmas, Spring Break and summer, to stay with a guy who your parents have never met, raise quite a few questions in the minds of those that are paying attention. Jenny was paying attention!

And, here I am now, writing this, looking at moving away for the summer so I can spend more time with him. Long distance relationships are funny, in that the short time you get to spend together is lived in fast forward. I wonder what three months will be like. I wonder what will happen when the summer ends. Is it the wise thing to do? Maybe not. But I think a person in my position has to allow for a little room to make mistakes, be prepared to take responsibility for

them, and most of all, to learn from them.

Writing this has already helped me in a lot of ways. I picture myself showing it to my family, to my friends, to Jason. I'm tired of keeping silent. I have some hard decisions ahead of me. I have a lot of questions and a lot of doubts. And yet, I have a lot of faith as well.

I think that's what keeps me together. I know that's what will keep my family together.

Post Script

Wow. Four months ago, when I was busily and nervously writing this paper, I often wondered where I would be when the summer ended. Well, here I am, adding more to this paper.

So much has happened that I don't know where to begin again. But, I am writing this right now, so let me continue by talking about this paper.

I had to present this paper in class. It was the single most rewarding class-room experience I've ever had. I was the first one in the class to present their paper. I remember choosing the first position specifically so I could be done with it as quickly as possible. It wasn't something I was looking forward to per say, but I knew it would be good for me. It was so much so, that I'd gladly welcome the same sort of opportunity again today. To be able to stand up in front of a number of people—people who I'd gotten to know a bit and people whose opinions and academic insights matter to me—and talk about my faith and my experiences for one of the first times in my life was . . . well, I can't really describe it. I got up there, and I just started talking. I was talking, and talking, and I didn't want to stop. I had a whole lifetime of learning that I had to squeeze into twenty-five minutes, and twenty-five pages. I couldn't do it. But it was wonderful to try. It was not only a learning experience, but a sort of spiritual culmination. I finally told people about myself, my sexuality, and the family and Lord I love—and I didn't have to separate one from the other.

Moments of relief, however, came to be balanced later with moments of frenzy. In the final stages of preparing this paper, I caught wind from a friend that my sister was finally going to confront me about whether or not I was gay. I wondered if Jenny would finally come to ask me my question. Moreover, if she did, I wondered how I would reply. The timing sucked! What

was I supposed to say? “Yeah, Jen, I’m gay, and I’m leaving for the summer, so we won’t really have time to talk about this, but you better believe that I’ll be having a gay old time with my boyfriend...”

It was mere days before I was leaving for Seattle. Jenny came home from college, and she and I went to a movie, as is often our custom. I was terribly nervous. What’s more, I was sensing that she was nervous, too. I waited. And waited. And waited. It didn’t come before the movie. The whole ride home from the theater, I was in quite a state. Should I keep talking, to keep the communication open? Should I be silent, and invite her to ask? When she did ask, what would I say?

Approximately 73 seconds away from home, she asked the question—my question. She couldn’t have phrased it any better. “I’ll always love you, no matter what. But I’m worried about you, and your faith. I want to know if you’re gay.” Those aren’t the exact words. I was nervous, so I can’t quite remember—but that was the gist. And I told her the truth. I told her I was. Her eyes glistened over, but she didn’t cry. She was very sympathetic, explaining that she thought it was wrong, but that she did a lot of wrong things, too. She wanted to be sure that I was still a Christian, and I assured her I was.

Then, however, she asked about Jason. I’m not proud of the response I gave, but I do think it was the right one. I lied. I told her we were just friends. I thought that I could bear the consequences of the truth, but I didn’t want her to have to bear them. I didn’t want to drop two bombs on her in a row, and then leave for Seattle. The gay issue was enough. The boyfriend issue could be broached at another time, when we would have more opportunity for communication. I wanted to assert my gay identity first in the abstract, emphasizing who I was—

a whole 20 years of life experiences—and that had nothing to do with who I would be spending the summer with.

It became a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, though. Four months later, Jason and I are just friends. Even though things didn't work out like I had hoped, this summer was one of the best and most valuable times of my life.

Going into the situation, I knew it would be difficult. I knew that there were some likely hardships ahead. Proximity would be a challenge for Jason and I. Once in the situation, it became obvious to us both that even though we were alike in many ways, we also had key differences. We made better friends than anything else, and that's what we are now. But he'll always hold a somewhat special place in my life. He was the first guy that I ever loved. I question now if I was actually "in love." Was I? I thought so. But you can't grasp feeling—especially feeling that is remembered from the past, however fond those remembrances may be. All you can do is feel it today, and know it tomorrow.

Seattle, though, gave me the first chance I'd ever had to be myself. I met a lot of friends there, and I was open with them, about my faith and my sexuality. It's hard to explain, but the two are so linked in me and my life experiences that it's hard for me to separate them. A complete picture of my faith can't be drawn unless you know about the circumstances in which it lives. The people I met there knew, and thus, it was a spiritual highpoint for me. In some respects, it was difficult to come home—because people here, today, as I'm writing this, don't know. Not yet.

But they will. I'm fairly certain that this will be my last semester teaching at the Christian college where I'm now employed. I'm not sure how I will leave yet. I enjoy the job immensely,

and I think I do a very good job—but I don't like feeling like I have to sneak around and present an image of me that isn't genuine. I may show them this paper. If they'd still like me to stay, I would certainly consider it.

And, more importantly, my family will know, too. I've already talked to Jenny more about it. She knows about Jason. I'm beginning to open lines of dialog in my family. One of the reasons for this post-script is so that I might show them this paper. The last thing I want to do is hurt them, but perhaps the truth is bound to hurt—a little or a lot. I have wounds. My family has wounds. Without the truth, they won't heal.

This paper is my life. It's the truth. And, most of all, I want it to heal.

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Annotated Bibliography

Arterburn, Jerry. How Will I Tell My Mother: A True Story of One Man's Battle With Homosexuality & Aids. Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1988.

This is the account of a self-proclaimed ex-homosexual, who is now dead from AIDS. While I'm skeptical of the practice of reforming homosexuals, this narrative showed me that, for some Christians, this may indeed be their only viable option, psychologically. Arterburn describes how he engaged in drinking and dancing, and proclaims that "When I later entered the homosexual lifestyle, it wasn't such a large leap" (50). The guilt he brings forward in his book is acutely felt, and in many cases heart-breaking to read. However, I couldn't really relate to the allure of the gay lifestyle as described by Arterburn. I've usually found myself outside of the loop when it comes to the drinking, dancing and flamboyant characters that attracted Arterburn.

Brunson, Harold E. Homosexuality and the New Testament: What Does Christian Scripture Really Teach. Bethesda, MD: International Scholars Publications, 1998.

While normally I like to think I'm open to Christian rhetoric decrying the evilness of homosexuality, Brunson was particularly scary in his descriptions and associations (quoted in this paper). A very solid law approach without much light, singling out homosexuality as a particularly evil and extraordinarily damnable sin through biblical exegesis. What disturbed me most was Brunson's apparent division between gay Christians and other Christians. He would not doubt consider "gay Christian" to be a contradiction in terms. He uses some interesting flowery language, such as when he declares that, "the smoke of their torment overcomes most homosexuals and their burning desires flash-out like consuming wildfire" (46). He follows seventy pages of doom and gloom with three pages of gospel. Worth reading to get the extreme perception, but have some particularly affirming texts on hand as well to give you the complete perspective.

De le Huerta, Christian. Coming Out Spiritually: The Next Step. New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999.

This book was of most value in the points when it stuck to the narrative of the affirming faith of an openly gay man. De la Huerta's faith and activism are particularly encouraging. However, I found the book less effective in terms of de le Huerta's views on theology. Ironically, a book that is intended to be spiritually affirming for almost anyone excluded me already in the forward, when it was suggested to not read Paul due to his antiquated views (excluding at least half of the New Testament). However, when biblical exegesis is problematic, the strength of de la Huerta's perspective as revealed in the narrative portions of the text more than make up for it. Appendix one is also a useful guide in examining how differing religions and Christian denominations view homosexuality.

Duff, Nancy J. "How to Discuss Moral Issues Surrounding Homosexuality When You Know You Are Right." Homosexuality and Christian Community. Ed. Choon-Leong Seow. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

This was a fantastic article! Duff, a Christian lesbian theologian from Princeton Theological Seminary, proclaims the need for continued dialog in the Christian church regarding the issue of

homosexuality. Her logic is particularly sound, and her willingness to defend her stance while listening and acknowledging the truth of the opposing side is particularly refreshing. Her article touches on everything from the origins of homosexuality to homophobia to the ordination of homosexuals.

Gay Christian Online. Online. Internet. 28 April 2000. Available FTP:

www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/5065/

This is a particularly effective website, developed by a gay Christian man, initially as a homepage, but it has now become a vast resource for information on being both gay and Christian. A variety of articles are available, including “How You Can Be a Gay Christian (Despite What You’ve Been Told Otherwise),” “Gay Christian Self Esteem,” “Gay and Married, A Christian Perspective,” open letters, and the webmaster’s own personal narrative. A very comprehensive website that addresses theological debate on the issue of homosexuality, but instead of engaging with it, offers the individual perspective of an open, affirming, gay Christian man, whose ministry is based in love, no matter where one stands on the issue.

A Gay Christian Place. Online. Internet. 26 April 2000. Available FTP:

www.angelfire.com/co2/agaychristianplace/article23.html

This is a webpage containing an array of Christian narratives, all of them affirming of the practicing gay lifestyle. Many of the narratives, like James’s, quoted in this paper, describe the moment of transformation in the life of gay Christians, when they shed their guilt and find the light, so to speak. The narratives are encouraging, but they also seem to fulfill a gay agenda. I’m all for affirming narratives, but I want to hear about the difficulties since these “transformations” as well. I feel like I’m not getting all of their reality.

Gill, Sean, ed. The Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement. New York: Cassell, 1998.

The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement was founded in 1976 and has become the most prominent group in fighting to bring about a reformed and affirming atmosphere towards gays and lesbians in the Christian church. This book provides a history of that movement, but, more importantly, it also provides a variety of narratives and letters—some from some confused and questioning individuals.

Johnson, Barbara. Where Does a Mother Go to Resign? Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1979.

This is the riveting narrative of a mother who discovers that her son is a homosexual, and the spiritual crisis she undergoes because of it. In a way, it has prepared me for coming out to my own mother—I gained a lot of insight from this book on what goes through the mind of the person to whom you are coming out. At the same time, it’s a little scary. Johnson gets extremely depressed, and thinks some rather extreme thoughts. I truly appreciate the honesty of her narrative, though. She reveals her faults as well as her strengths. The progress that has been made in providing support to families in such a crises over the last twenty years is also apparent, and I think this speaks to the power of a narrative that, for its time, was revolutionary. Silence needs to be broken on all sides of the issue.

Jones, H. Kimball. Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual. New York: Associated Press, 1966.

This book was primarily useful in that it clued me in on just how long the debate on homosexuality has been occurring. Issues on homosexuality that are still debated today in theological circles, such as the notion of the “absolute invert,” have been around since at least the 60s. This was news to me. Reading this book, I found many ideas that would still today be considered liberal, but they were being argued almost forty years ago.

Rice, Chris. “What I Learned When I Opened My Mouth About Gay Rights.” Sojourners Magazine. 3 May 2000. Sojourners Magazine Online. Online. Internet. Available FTP: www.sojo.net/soj0005/000561.html.

Much like the Duff article, Rice attests to the need for an ongoing church dialog on the issue of homosexuality, except this time the message is coming from a more conservative point of view. Nevertheless, it is much the same message. Rice also calls attention not only to the silence of homosexuals, but of their friends, family, and those who would speak against homosexuality within the church.

Scroggs, Robin. The New Testament and Homosexuality. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983. This is a particularly refreshing example of biblical exegesis. Scroggs not only incorporates the original Greek texts of the New Testament in examining the issue of homosexuality, but also incorporates an in-depth discussion of the cultural practice of homosexuality in biblical times and compares it to the practice today. Scroggs notes many differences between homosexuality then and now, namely that in times past it was a type of pederasty and not often comparable to today. Scroggs attempts to determine what the New Testament says about homosexuality, and concludes that because cultural practices are so entirely different, the Bible does not specifically dictate whether homosexuality is a sin or not.

Seow, Choon-Leong, ed. Homosexuality and Christian Community. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

This work contains the Duff article, as well as many others dealing with all sides of the issue of homosexuality from a variety of different stances, many from theologians at Princeton Theological Seminary. The first third of the collection deals with varying interpretations of the Bible regarding homosexuality, whereas the latter essays put homosexuality within the context of Christian practice. This collection is noteworthy for its academic and theological breadth between a multitude of perspectives. A very worthwhile and informative work.