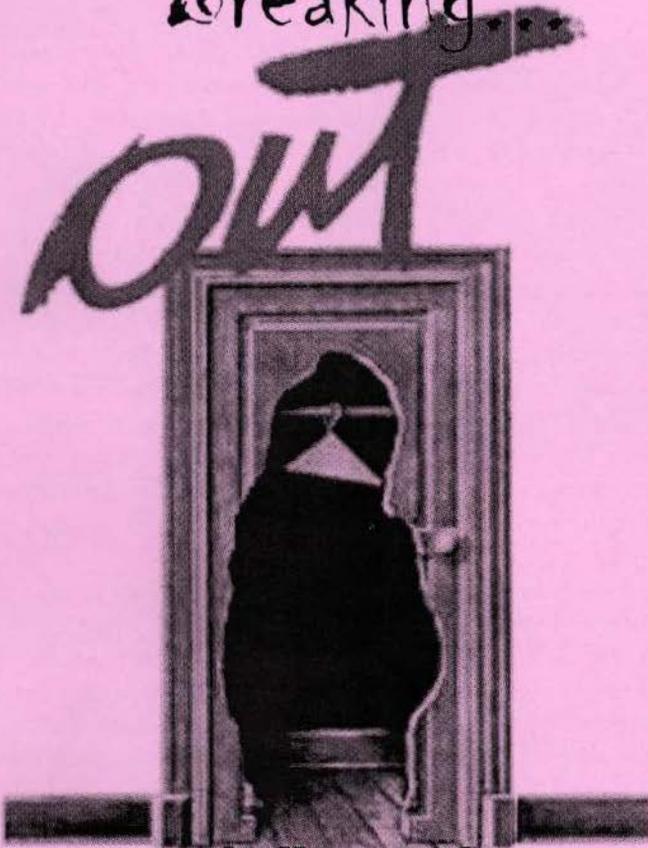


October 11, 2004

Mad Kweer
Breaking...



**In Honor of
National Coming
Out Day
October 11, 2004**

**The Voices of Gay, Lesbian,
Bisexual, Transgender and
Queer Youth**

"A Closet?... Is that where I just busted out of?"

Hey!! My name is Shawn Neal and I work at AIDS Network here in Madison, Wisconsin. I thought that since most of the people who have stories in this zine wrote about their own experiences, that I would share a little bit more about who I am and why I started this Zine.

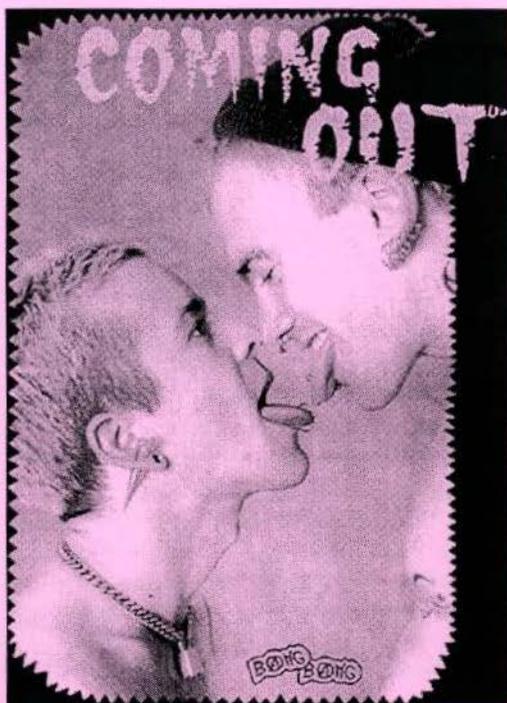
I came out when I was 17. The first person I came out to was a guy my age I met on AOL. We had been talking for a couple nights about other things (mainly NIN and depressing poetry). I decided that late one night that I would tell him about something that I have been thinking about in the last couple of months. I remember that I was shaking with fright when I wrote those words. He didn't write back for awhile. When he finally did, he said that he was thinking similar thoughts and didn't know what it meant for him. I was so happy and excited to know that there was someone else my age with those feelings (given that I lived in a small Pennsylvania town with NO known Gay people anywhere...seriously). I had no GSA with peers that felt the same. All that I had was this guy in California.

I told my friends first that I was gay. I knew that if they cared about me then it wouldn't matter. Most were cool with me being gay. There are even some guys who stood up for me when other guys wanted to push me around. Though I heard a lot was talked about me behind my back (welcome to high school, right?) I had a pretty good experience at school. I had some friends who didn't feel comfortable being around me and I guess that just meant they had their own feelings to work out. A friend of mine came out as being bi but was harassed so much that he didn't talk about it anymore.

The only people in my family that I came out to were my mother, brother, and stepfather. My brother was ok with it but I'm still dealing (7 years later) with some issues with my parents.

When I was in college, I knew that I wanted others to have that same feeling I had when I made a connection with that guy from California about being gay. I started up a teen gay group in my town and had some scared high school students show up. But they met one another and soon found those safe connections.

The feeling of being alone and the feeling like no one knows how your feeling is even stronger when your queer. But with more of us coming out and talking about it, the more we will realize that we have "family" all over the state.



"Name Shopping" -Dakota *

Name Shopping

Hello. My name is Dakota. Not my birth name. Perhaps it's hard to understand if you haven't been in the position yourself. Let me explain.

I realized I was transgendered at some point in my 15th year. I don't know what brought it on exactly; just one day as I stepped into the shower I looked down at myself and thought "ohshit". I thought I was FTM for a while. Some days I am a fag. Other days, a boydyke. Most days, though, I have no gender.

When I realized all my gender issues weren't going away (never had, probably never would), I decided "hey. I need a new name. This girl name is all flowers and feminine and I just don't like it."

Pardon the political incorrectness, but that's how my mind works.

I got out a baby names book. The cover was pastel blue, with a dazzling array of... storks? Well, okay. I flipped through the pages. Shopping for a name – now THERE'S an experience they don't teach you in high school. It was kind of surreal. The name "Dakota" caught my eye all of a sudden. Probably because of the way it sounded in my head – duh ko tuh. It seemed strong, durable, like a name for someone who could handle anything. "My name is Dakota," I whispered. It fit.

COMING OUT IN PAKISTAN

I have had an interesting experience with my parents over the past 6 plus years about me being gay. That is the one and only time it was ever spoken of, or rather I was called to account for my "keeping of company" with my then lover (*tumhara dost*/"your friend") in Lahore.

My mom had been suspecting that I was "that way inclined", having heard the rumours and then "eyewitness account" of a cousin who caught me kissing a guy. Hence she was highly suspicious of me spending out at my then lover's place (he was from another city and was working in Lahore and had his own where he lived alone). And then I was caught again with him, and the word spread all the way to my mother via my brother through his friends.

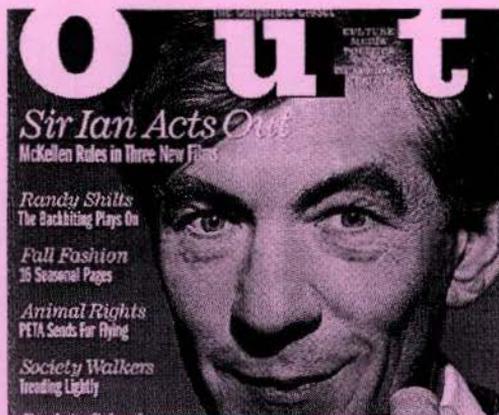
So one day when I arrived home having spent the night with (let's call him) Salim: my mother shouted and screamed at me in front a whole "council" of her 4 out of 8 sisters (and step sisters). *Ise to mard aur aurat aur Jaanwar ke darmiyaan faraq hi nahin pata, iski jaldi shaadi kar deni chahiye* (he doesn't know the difference between men and women and animals, we should marry him off soon).

I warded off the assault with a smile and retorted "But I DO know the difference...what are you talking about? *Khuda kher kare*. And then the exchange became heated and that gave me a chance to start spilling out all the accumulated anger. "When Salim phones you are rude to him. If you have something against us then attack ME...not him. You don't even know him." *Acha ab woh tumhari maa se pyaara ho gaya* (Now he is dearer to you than your mother). She asked me to be shameful of my acts in front of the whole family and ask for forgiveness (*apne aamaal pe sharam karo aur sab ke saamne maafi maango*). My one liner was: The day I feel ashamed of my acts I will ask for forgiveness, as yet, I have done nothing I personally feel ashamed of. *Jis din koyi sharamnaak harkat karron ga us din maafi maangoon ga, aaj tak eisa mauqa nahin aaya ke mujhe kisi baat ki sharmin-dagi ho*.

Over the years, I suspect, that the whole family has found out (through my cousins that I came out to) and there have been a couple of bad incidents (like not inviting me to my brother's wedding, or not asking my opinion in my sister's engagement to someone I know.."Now the whole world knows what he is up to").

I broke up with my boyfriend of six years and feeling introspective, after 9 months of no direct communication (since my brother's wedding) I picked up the phone two weeks ago and made that call. My dad (who is now permanently back in Lahore) answered the phone. He asked me why I sounded so down. I cried and told him that "I broke up with my partner" (in English). He said: It happens in life *beta!*. He was apologetic that they didn't invite me to my brother's wedding, my mom cried her heart out when he handed her the phone and apologised ("it happened so quickly we couldn't inform you" and I thought it expedient to accept the excuse),

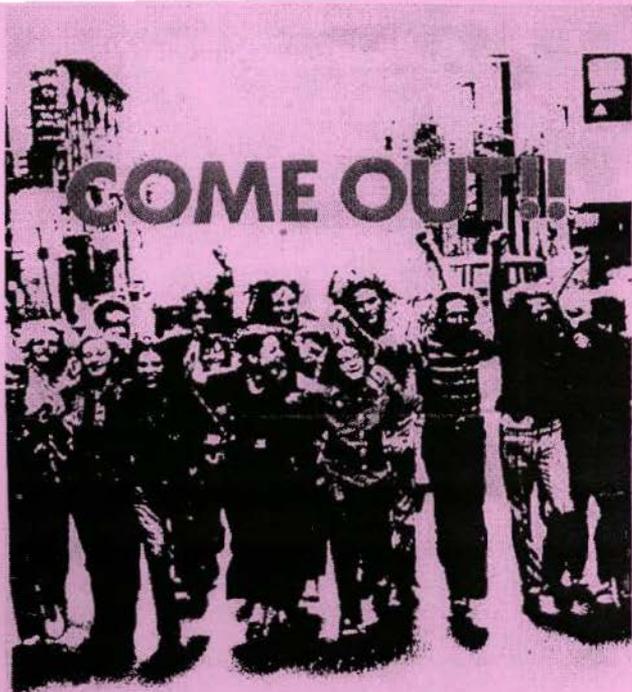
:) Hasan



"It Could've Been Worse" -Nix*

A lot of people look at me funny when I tell them about how I came out to my mum. After returning home from a concert back in 8th grade, I was so full of energy I was about to burst. It was the first real concert that I'd been to with my best buddies without parental supervision, so I wanted to tell Mom about everything, not only having to do with the bands, but this exceptionally hot girl with one of the coolest outfits I'd ever seen! ... So I did.

"Eventually you were gonna figure this out anyway, so... Mom, I like girls." She didn't say anything at first, but then she was like, "... okay. I hadn't expected that, but if it makes you happy... I'm glad you told me." I was elated. So I finished telling my story and everything was fine. Unfortunately it couldn't just end like that. March of my 9th grade year, Mum all of the sudden had a problem me being bisexual. I guess she had been hoping it was a just phase in the beginning, and when she figured out it wasn't, she didn't approve at all. She was afraid that she was "losing her little girl" (since I was, and still am, quite a tomboy). She and I had our only true blue argument over this, as well as a few other things that she didn't like about me. Both of us ended up in tears and she threatened to take away my favorite hobbies, indoor percussion and marching band. We were on pretty bad terms for a while there and I had even thought of getting emancipated once I hit 16, but fortunately it didn't get that far. By that fall, everything was fine again, and my mum absolutely loved my first girlfriend. Since then, Mom's still hoped that someday I would find a great guy, but she doesn't care about my sexual orientation anymore. I'm really glad it ended like this, because with a family as close as mine, I would've hated to lose them over something all of us should embrace...love.



"I first came out when I was 15 years old. My mom was the first person to know. When I told her I started crying, just one of those reflexes kids do, start crying when they want to say something important. But when I said it she warmed up to me and as it turns out, she told me, she was bisexual too. I'd been questioning my sexuality since 5th grade. The closet was my home away from home. Slowly, I started feeling an attraction to girls, and so 5th grade is I guess when the ball got rolling.

When I imagined how my mom would react towards me I was totally unsure. I would have to say that at the time I didn't really care if she would accept me or not, because that is who I am. Its really not debatable.

Its not just kids that break down at the ultimatum of things, because when she told me she was bisexual also, she was crying. Some people think that even though you may be bisexual, you must be either straight or gay, and just confused. For example, I am bisexual and some people question that when I tell them just because I have a boyfriend. The bias against bisexuals, and stereotypes, just plain sucks."

-Charlie Ann Kerns written by Kat

Coming Out Advice

Coming Out To Friends

1. **Bring the subject up casually.** Start generically. Ask, do you have a crush on anyone? Or who do you think is cute? You can ask about people you know or celebrities.
2. **Bring up the issue.** Ask what they think of gay marriage, gays in the military or Gay/Straight Alliances in the schools. This is a good way to test the waters to see if they are homophobic or not.
3. **Let them know how you feel.** If someone tells a gay joke, be sure to say you don't think that's funny. If someone calls someone else a 'fag' or says something mean about gay people, be sure to stand up for them.
4. **Use a Celebrity.** Do you watch **Queer as Folk** or **Queer Eye for the Straight Guy**? Talk about the show and see how your friend responds. Mention the Madonna/Britney kiss and ask your friend if she has ever, or would she consider kissing another girl.
5. **Use another friend.** Is there some one in your school or circle of friends who is gay, lesbian or bisexual? Mention that person's name and see how your friend reacts.
6. **Go for it!** Depending on how the above steps go, you may decide to take the plunge and ask your big question, "Are you gay?" or drop the hint that you've been thinking about other girls.
7. **Breathe.** Discussing sexual orientation is one of the most stressful things a person can do. Be sure you're ready to have the conversation before you start it.

Tips:

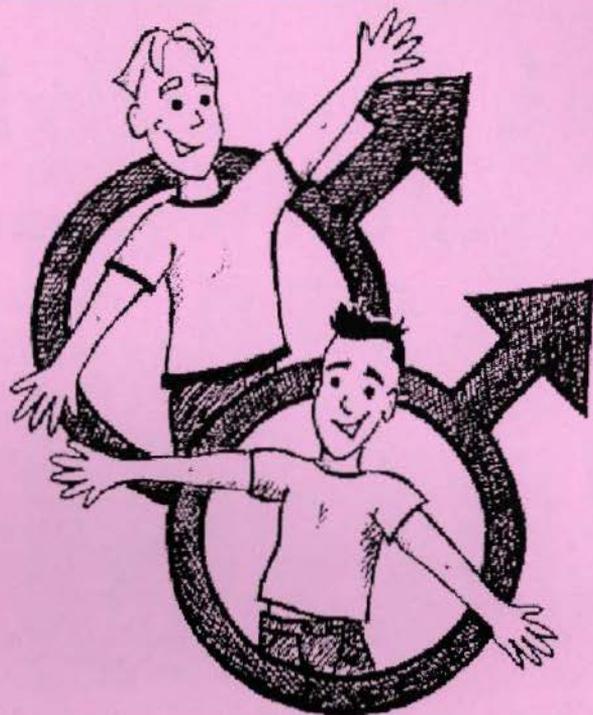
If your friend is obviously uncomfortable, drop it and change the subject.

Don't ask someone about their sexual orientation unless you have a close friendship with them.

Choose the right time for this discussion. You should make sure you're not in a place where it could be over heard.

Start out with the least amount of commitment. Instead of saying, "I'm certain I'm a lesbian and I've always felt this way," try "I think I might be gay."

Afterwards, take a moment with friends to get out how it felt to "come out"



A Mom's Letter to Those Who Hate

Many letters have been sent to the Valley News concerning the homosexual menace in Vermont. I am the mother of a gay son and I've taken enough from you good people. I'm tired of your foolish rhetoric about the "homosexual agenda" and your allegations that accepting homosexuality is the same thing as advocating sex with children. You are cruel and ignorant. You have been robbing me of the joys of motherhood ever since my children were tiny.

My firstborn son started suffering at the hands of the moral little thugs from your moral, upright families from the time he was in the first grade. He was physically and verbally abused from first grade straight through high school because he was perceived to be gay.

He never professed to be gay or had any association with anything gay, but he had the misfortune not to walk or have gestures like the other boys. He was called "fag" incessantly, starting when he was 6.

In high school, while your children were doing what kids that age should be doing, mine labored over a suicide note, drafting and redrafting it to be sure his family knew how much he loved them. My sobbing 17-year-old tore the heart out of me as he choked out that he just couldn't bear to continue living any longer, that he didn't want to be gay and that he couldn't face a life without dignity.

You have the audacity to talk about protecting families and children from the homosexual menace, while you yourselves tear apart families and drive children to despair. I don't know why my son is gay, but I do know that God didn't put him, and millions like him, on this Earth to give you someone to abuse. God gave you brains so that you could think, and it's about time you started doing that.

At the core of all your misguided beliefs is the belief that this could never happen to you, that there is some kind of subculture out there that people have chosen to join. The fact is that if it can happen to my family, it can happen to yours, and you won't get to choose. Whether it is genetic or whether something occurs during a critical time of fetal development, I don't know. I can only tell you with an absolute certainty that it is inborn.

You invoke the memory of the brave people who have fought on the battlefield for this great country, saying that they didn't give their lives so that the "homosexual agenda" could tear down the principles they died defending. My 83-year-old father fought in some of the most horrific battles of World War II, was wounded and awarded the Purple Heart.

He shakes his head in sadness at the life his grandson has had to live. He says he fought alongside homosexuals in those battles, that they did their part and bothered no one. One of his best friends in the service was gay, and he never knew it until the end, and when he did find out, it mattered not at all. That wasn't the measure of the man.

You religious folk just can't bear the thought that as my son emerges from the hell that was his childhood he might like to find a lifelong companion and have a measure of happiness. It offends our sensibilities that he should request the right to visit that companion in the hospital, to make medical decisions for him or to benefit from tax laws governing inheritance.

Her son is doing fine now, the first in his family to graduate from college.

Anthony's Story

I had just recently come out to my ex-girlfriend from middle school. I don't know why I came out to her first, but I had. I guess she was first because, at that time, it wouldn't be a big deal if she hated me. I had told her over the internet, the easiest because it's not face to face. But back to the week before spring break. I had found out a month or two ago that my family and I were moving, we didn't know where just yet. It seemed like the perfect opportunity. If my friends didn't like me because I was gay, I was going to be making new friends somewhere else anyway. The beginning of the week, we were all on our way to hang out at a friend's house, Stelzig's to be exact. Before his parents gave us all a ride home I said, "I have a big secret I want to tell you all, I even have an order to tell it in. But I don't know how so I'll give hints throughout the week."



Well, this happened in December of my junior year. I didn't tell them though, they just found out. They had been on the computer the night before and they saw a site with Viroqua in the title. They decided to check it out. It was my blog. [Kind of like an online journal] Of course I had written about being gay, it was the main thing I wrote about. The next morning, I was sitting in the sunroom reading the paper when my mom walks in. "Anthony, I need to ask you something and you can be totally honest... are you gay?" My mom had asked me this before, when I was in middle

school. I had lied, I wasn't ready to tell anyone, let alone my mom! This time, I decided I couldn't lie anymore. I was getting so much support from my friends and teachers. "Yeah." "Ok, good, you didn't lie this time. Your dad and I found your website, smalltownlife.cjb.net?"

The rest of that week was spent dropping very subtle hints, I wasn't going to give good hints until the twins, Matt and Paul, had their party. So we'll just skip ahead to then. All of us were at the "party." In the basement playing video games, that's all we ever did. It was getting towards the end of the night and Jarek was asking questions. I decided, what the hell, I dropped the big hint. "It has something to do with a show on TV, it's on Thursdays... starts with a W... the show is Will and Grace." It took him a second and then he said, "Wait... you're gay?!?" His reaction wasn't bad. He was the last one I wanted to tell, ended up being the first, and his reaction was positive! Total shock and awe! He said that that totally didn't matter to him. So, of course, Jarek pushes the issue, which was a good thing. I did the Will and Grace thing on the rest of them. It worked. Everyone else's reaction was much harder to gauge. They just all seemed shocked. There was silence for the rest of the night, even the car-ride home. I eventually lost touch with the twins, they didn't agree with my "lifestyle". So they started ignoring all of us. Everyone else, I'm still friends with, but I did end up moving... to Viroqua, Wisconsin. I still hadn't told my family...

We both feel that your being gay isn't an issue at all. What I'm a little angry about is what you said about your dad and brothers." "I was just venting, mom. It doesn't really mean anything." "That's what I figured. Can I ask you some questions?" "Ok" -- She continued on, asking if I've had a boyfriend, when I figured it out, if I've told others, and if I knew anyone who was gay. I answered her questions and said that I didn't want to talk about it anymore. I know some people wonder why I didn't tell the truth the first time she asked. Well, I used to think my parents would kick me out. Obviously, I was very wrong. I have the most supportive parents a person could ask for. I sometimes feel guilty because I can't totally relate to other people's experiences with their parents. After I told my parents, just with everyone else, there was a period of not talking about it. Eventually, my mom told me she had started telling the extended family. Everyone knows... except my uncle and his family in California. My mom advised against telling them for fear of them trying to "save" me or disown me. I will tell them, maybe just show up at a family reunion with my boyfriend. So, as far as I know, the bulk of my family knows that I am queer. And I am happy...

Anth (not pictured. check out his blog www.smalltownlife.cjb.net)

Coming Out Advice 2

Coming Out To Family

Try to schedule a chunk of uninterrupted time with your parent(s). It is usually better not to do this around some big family function, like Thanksgiving or the Winter Holidays. There is usually a lot of stress around these times of year already. However, if this is the only practical time, try to do it on a day that is less hectic.

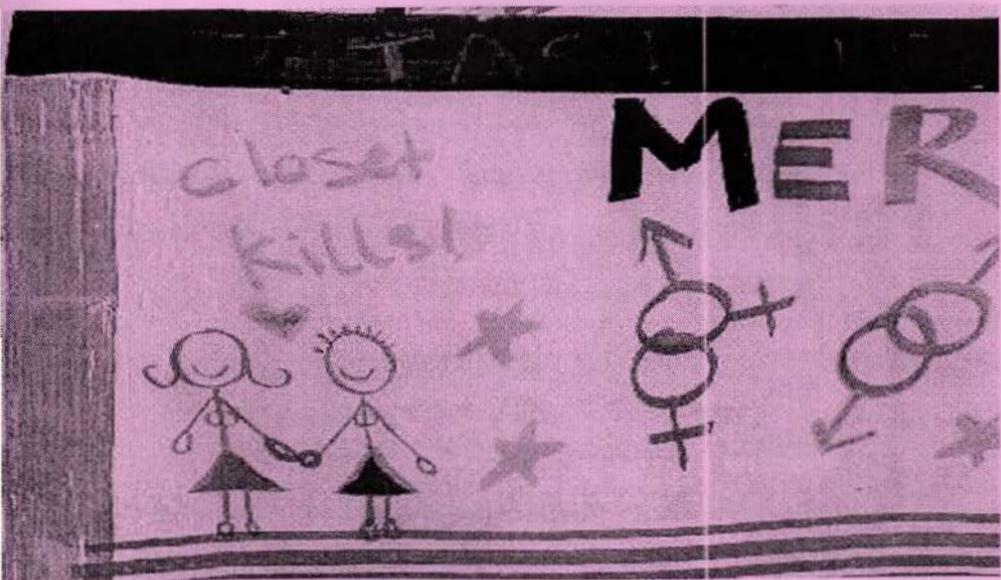
I would recommend coming out in person, rather than over the phone or in a letter or email. There's no replacing the face-to-face contact. If you're seeing someone, don't bring her along. Although you may want her support, it will probably be easier for your parents if it's just you. There'll be plenty of time for introductions later. Or if your parents have already met your sweetheart and she's dazzled them, you can let them know that she is your special one.

It's a good idea to plan out what you're going to say in advance. Practice on a friend. Ask others how they did it. Learn from their mistakes.

Have your parents asked you if you're gay? If they do, that might be the right time to tell them. When someone asks, it usually means they're ready to hear the answer. You might feel caught off guard and deny it in the heat of the moment. Don't worry, you can use that conversation as a stepping off place. "Mom, remember when you asked me if I was gay..." Acceptance takes time. Be patient with your parents. Just like it took you a while to come out to yourself, your parents need time, as well. How do your parents react in stressful situations? This will be a good indicator of how they will take your news.

One thing to keep in mind is that your parents are experiencing a loss. Even though you are excited and proud of your life choice, they may need some time to let go of the dreams they had for you. They may be thinking they will never see you walk down the aisle or become grandparents. Later, as they grow to accept your lesbianism, they will see that those things are possible for you too. Right now they might not see it.

Be prepared to answer questions. Let them know this is not something you chose, nor was it their fault. The only choice you have made is to be honest with them. Do your parents belong to a religion that condemns homosexuality? You might be prepared with some religious teachings from their faith that counter those arguments.



COMING OUT BISEXUAL

I CAME OUT AS BEING BISEXUAL AFTER I HAD THE BIGGEST CRUSH EVER ON MY BEST FRIEND... I WAS "YOUNG" (14), BUT I REALLY FELT LIKE I HAD EVERYTHING FIGURED OUT ABOUT ME. I MEAN, COME ON, HOW MANY OTHER 14-YEAR-OLDS DON'T KNOW THEIR SEXUALITY?

IRONICALLY, IT TURNED OUT THAT I DIDN'T KNOW MY SEXUALITY. AT THE 2004 GLSEN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE, I WAS SO COMPLETELY CONFUSED, PARTICULARLY AT CAUCUSES, WHEN WE HAD TO DIVIDE INTO GROUPS BASED ON SEXUALITY.

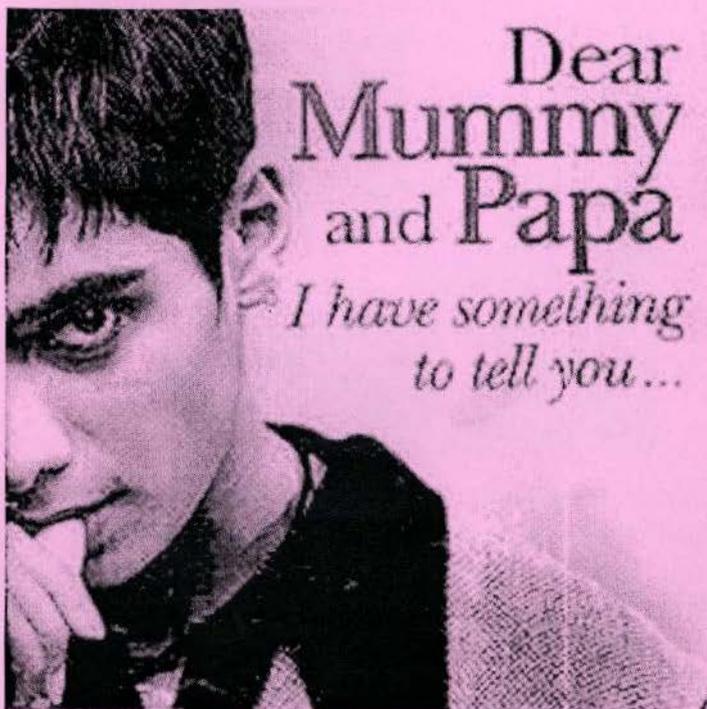
I GUESS I'M STILL TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THE PARTICULARS OR WHATEVER - I DON'T REALLY LIKE GUYS (IN A RELATIONSHIP SENSE), BUT I DON'T FEEL LIKE I'M REALLY READY TO COMMIT TO LIKING JUST ONE PARTICULAR GENDER (IN THIS CASE FEMALES!!)

THANKS!!!

~M

**On the way down, I saw you
And you saved me from myself
And I won't forget the way you loved me
On the way down I almost fell right through
But I held onto you**

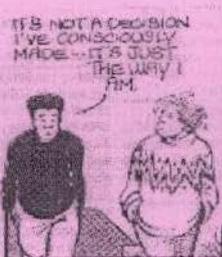
**Down, down, down
But I held onto you
Down, down, down
But I held onto you**



Dear Mummy and Papa

I have something to tell you...

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE



FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE



FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE



ILLUSTRATION BY WALTER D'ARCO FOR BOB D'ARCO



My family extends beyond the universe. They (my mum and dad) divorced and remarried (multiple times) but I hold on to those parents who my mum and dad have left. For me, coming out is a non-stop, never ending issue. I never planned to come out. I just dated and knew I was a lesbian (meaning came out to myself, which I think is just as hard as anything else) and was contend with that. Then my dad got tired of my lying and told me "You can either tell me the truth or lie to me but either way I know (you're dating a girl.)"

I never had a problem coming out to anyone save those such as my family. However, it is a joke to think that they don't know. They asked me if I was 'Gay' at the point when I had no idea if I was bi, lesbian, or just confused. By the time I didn't know they had stopped asking. Now I've been dating the same girl for more than a year and a half and my parents silently accept it. Some of the only times that I treat straight youth differently than LGBTQ youth is when I think of what a struggle gay kids go through. To realize something so vital about yourself, along with all the struggles any gay or straight kid would go through, calls for some respect if you ask me. Nothing is as scary as coming out. However, its been my experience (though certainly not everyones) that its never as bad as you're predicting and usually does lift a weight off of your shoulders, whether or not you knew one was there.

-Kat Iscampi, Lesbian, East High School

Break Free

By Sabrina miller

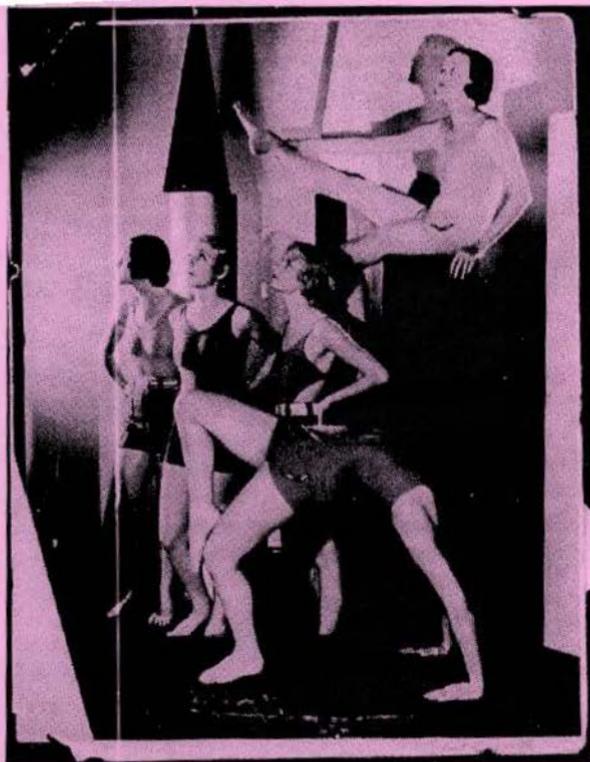
I was born into a Mormon family
My parents say I will marry a nice boy someday
Too many restraints, I'm not myself
I will marry a woman someday
We will raise our kids Mormon-free
I've seen people tear themselves up inside
pretending
To be something they're not.

I am who I am

You've got to struggle with a relationship
You change yourself but always
Search for a perfect fit anyway
I've seen people, cult people
Desperate people, longing for God, love
Longing for acceptance
If peace and joy and love are holy
And all you want to do is love
Why are you unholy?
They twist our words our actions
Wiccans say that sex can be a beautiful thing
Christians say that Wiccans believe in group
orgies
Remember the altar boys?
Society could drive us mad
We search for love like we search for God
We search and search
We gain hope and lost hope
We find our religion, we marry it
We become obsessed with it and begin to

Change

People realize they want something more
We begin to lose our religion, using it
Or we become so obsessed;
people can lose themselves in other people.
Soon though, all the
Men, women
Priests, priestesses,
Will either break free
Or go mad

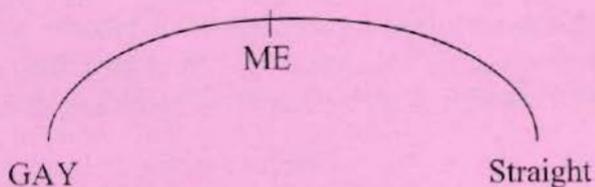


Well, I don't really want to write and I don't know why but my friend REALLY REALLY wants me to so I am.

When I came out I first told a friend of mine who had just come out (the one who's making me write this). He was really supportive of me and told me I should tell other people too. But it was almost a year later before I had the courage to do that.

We had just started a new GSA and after a few meetings I told the group. I didn't just stand in front of them though and say something like "I'm Bi". Oh no that would make sense.

What I did was draw on the chalkboard. The image was something like this.



Well that's how I came out to my friends.

~Dan the Bi guy

A BIG THANKS TO.....

Kat from Madison - who came up with the great idea for a Coming Out Zine

Issa Preston from Eau Claire— for providing some great prose and poetry. Please check out her site: www.geocities.com/All_of_the_truth
All stories with an “*” came from her site!!

Anthony & Dan from Viroqua—for showing us that there are some well spoken and strong queer youth in even the small towns like Viroqua

Brian J aka Mama J from GLSEN—without Brian, South Central Wisconsin wouldn't have the strong group of queer youth that we do.

AIDS Network from Madison—thanks for supporting efforts to provide queer youth with information to keep them safe and sane in Wisconsin :-)

OutReach & Proud Theater—For being an awesome resource for Queer youth!!

And thanks to the countless number of queer youth who are raising their voice and making a difference in their school and their community. You are the ones who become role models for younger queers and help them feel more comfortable to openly love and to openly be loved by peers of the same sex. You are the ones who are redefining what gender means and are redefining what a “normal” life really is.

And I thank you for inspiring me to keep on working with queer youth!



Websites and Resources for Queer & Questioning Youth

Info on Lesbian Life: <http://lesbianlife.about.com/>

A fun site for the boys: <http://chadzboyz.com/index.html>

A Place to talk to queer kids your age: www.mogenic.com

Information site for Queer youth: <http://www.youthresource.com/>

AIDS Network's SITE: www.AIDSNetwork.org

OutReach's Website: www.outreachinc.com

GSA Info: <http://www.glsensew.org/>

Get Info on Madison Gay Happenings, sign up for the listserv:
<http://tps.studentorg.wisc.edu/TPS/lists.html>