

HOMOGENETIC

By Jason Whipple

Cold Front

I was born gay. I'm gay every morning I wake up. I'm gay when I brush my teeth. I'm gay when I do one-handed cartwheels down Main Street. I was not born to hate myself the way I did for most of my life, though.

My sexuality is part of my genetic make-up; it has been there since the day I squeezed out through my screeching mother twenty-three years ago.

When I came out to my family, they asked me many of the usual questions ... why does it have to be this way? how did you become gay? when did this happen? I told my mother that my sexuality was like having brown hair and that I just happened to get the homo gene instead of the other ones. She cried hysterically: "But that means I gave it to you!"

No one in my family is gay, so why am I? I seem to have been created in a vacuum. I can understand the fear that some people deal with when the word homosexuality is uttered: you never know where we'll surface; it just might be your child.

It is difficult for me to go to my parent's house these days because I have a hard time interacting with my family. They all seem content with talking about the latest cold front. My family is content in their simplicity; I am content in trying to find my simplicity. I'm sure our clash of ideas, generations, and realities will produce an interesting book one day.

Tigers of Memory

Memories as images from my childhood leap out at me like tigers from every corner of my parent's house when I visit. Last Christmas, though, I decided not to be so passive in that flow of memories. I decided I would prepare my pistol for hunting.

My parents have always kept their photo albums in the living room, underneath the television that is always on. As usual, my parents were watching some program, my mother knitting, my father flipping through a fishing magazine.

I had gone through all of the photos before, but I had attained new eyes since I had seen the images last. All the birthday parties, Christmas trees, Easter baskets, and first day of school photos seemed more rich in depth because I was getting older. I used to hate looking at those pictures because it reminded me of who I was; those images were mirrors that I never allowed myself to look into.

Nothing really struck me as interesting until I reached the pictures of my youth while I lived in Alaska. There was one photograph in particular that surprised me, but only slightly. On the back of the photo, my mother had written the year 1984 with a pen. I was six in the picture. It must have been my birthday because there were gifts next to me: a clock, a book or two, Masters

of the Universe action figures, and the Care Bear named Tenderheart that I still sleep with to this day. I was wearing a t-shirt that I got during that birthday because it looked new – it had creases still on its side and on the shoulders. It was a dark blue t-shirt with Boy George's face on it. The words "Culture Club" were scribbled across it in a silver glittery material.

I couldn't believe the evidence in front of me. Yes, it was true – I was obsessed with Culture Club as a child, and I remember my parents buying me all of their albums.

I wasn't old enough to fully understand the gender-bending, but I sensed it throughout my body even at that early age. In a family that never listened to music, and in a land as far away as Alaska where even the soap operas were on six month delay, I had found a role model in Boy George.

The revelation was comforting; pieces were falling into place. The past was the present was the past.

I turned to my father immediately, shared with him the discovery that I had made and exclaimed, "Look what you did to me!" I only meant it to be a joke, but my father didn't seem too amused with the picture as I had been. I forgot that his wounds might still be simmering and that I was pouring salt in them.

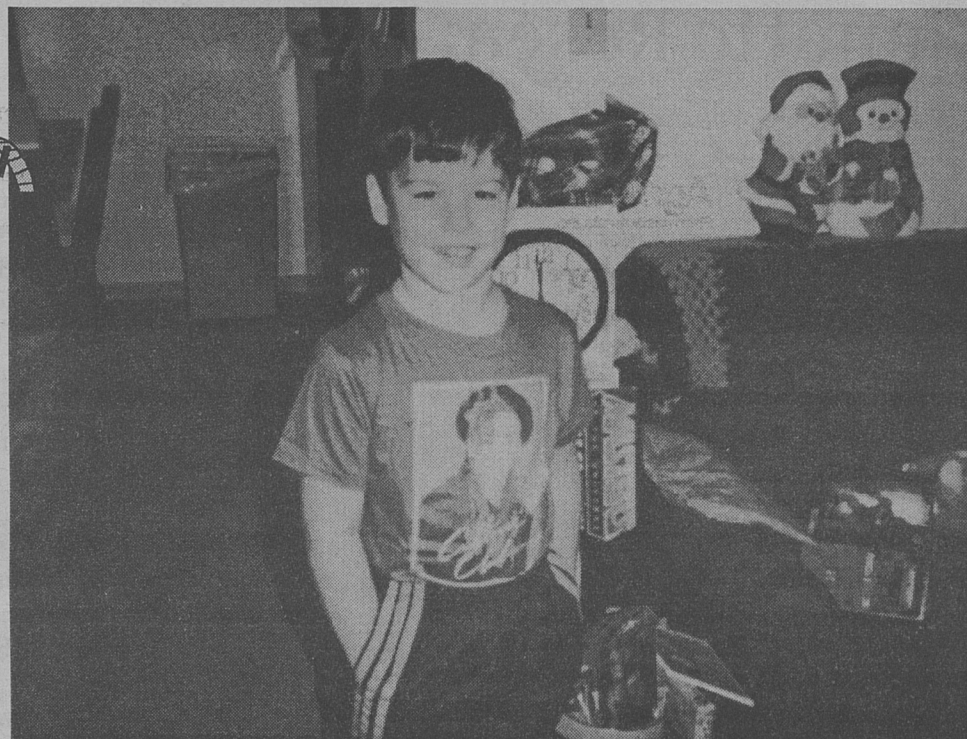
With that discovery, I went on the hunt again for other scenes from my history:

When I first started to have sexual thoughts at the age of nine, I used to peruse the underwear pages of JC Penney and Sears catalogs. I loved lusting over the sexual possibilities of those half-naked men.

I was jerking off in the downstairs bathroom once and the heavy Sears catalog fell to the ground, ripping page 432 in half. Terrified of the potential evidence of my naughtiness, I tore out the page neatly so that no one would be able to tell the page was missing unless that person were counting the page numbers at the bottom. I flushed the evidence, piece by piece, down the toilet. Later that evening, my mother stomped out of the bathroom and asked, after she had flushed the toilet, why black gunk had come out instead. As usual, I only shrugged my shoulders in selective ignorance.

Other memories came to me:

I collected sports cards along with my brother and father, not because I liked it, but because they were doing it and children follow example. After awhile, I lost interest in the value of the little pieces of cardboard and hoped that each package of cards I opened revealed bigger and bigger packages on the players. I started to watch the Atlanta Braves with my mother on TBS almost every night, salaciously catching glimpses of the pitchers Greg Maddux, John Smoltz, and some of the other beefy baseball players. What else



would I look at during those long pauses between pitches?

And another:

My brother and I partly grew up during the late 80's ... the era of hair bands, Aquanet bangs, and stone-washed jeans. When other boys were probably having wet dreams to half-naked women from every other video on MTV, I was getting off on the lead singers in the bands wearing tight spandex. Those musicians seemed so eager to show off those huge cocks that traveled forever down their muscled legs.

The memories go on and on. I'll be writing about them for years.

Fish Out of Water

I know my parents always knew I was gay. They were just afraid to ask. Hell, even I'd be shocked if I spent my entire life building up a fantasy about grandchildren and white picket fences only to have my son tell me that he was a gay poet, not a heterosexual chemist intent on having five kids. If my father was threatened by who I was, he never showed it; he still doesn't. He has the ability to keep his emotions hidden. Apparently, I made him cry once after I came out to him; my mother told me that awhile ago. I can sense the weight we've all carried shedding from us.

I think my father probably felt the need to pass on the torch of masculinity to his sons through fishing and hunting. It's a strange idea, considering that my boyfriend is more butch than my father is, and hunting camps and Budweiser are nowhere in my brother's future, especially mine. Perhaps in a combination of nostalgia and confusion my father produces surrealistic fish-in-outer-space paintings in the basement of his house these days.

The thought of hanging out with other men was actually repulsive to me. The one time that I did agree to go fishing with my brother and father, I ended up puking Twinkies on the side of the road on the way home. I was more interested in how much food and soda I could shove in my mouth instead of hooking a small mouth bass at a deserted lake in Western Tennessee. I was more content exploring my own little brain, working on word puzzles late at night underneath my sheets with a flashlight.

My mother was not so shy in her emotional expressions. She always had a threatening tone in her voice when she spoke to me. I can't be sure if she

did the same thing to my brother, but it didn't seem that she did. On one occasion, I was sitting in front of our house in Tennessee on the military base playing with dolls with a few girlfriends of mine. This was not a usual thing I did – I actually played War with my brother and his friends more often. While I was watching the kids in the street playing kickball, I was combing the hair of Peaches n' Cream Barbie. Suddenly, I heard my mother calling me into the house; she was standing on the front porch. She brought me inside to the living room and proceeded to threaten me, telling me to stop playing with those dolls. Those were intimate moments between a mother and child that the mother probably hoped would disappear into the child's memory somewhere.

I had no power to say anything then – her reality was my reality. It is clear that she feared my homosexuality. Her fear lurked in that brain of hers, traveled down her arm for a moment, and shook in her hand even longer. I hoped that she wouldn't hit me. I couldn't say anything because I didn't know what was wrong. I lacked vocabulary not emotion.

Warm Front

My friend Scott and I were walking down Church Street together recently. The night air was still chilly, but we were only wearing t-shirts. We should have been wearing sweaters, but as Vermonters, we like to push the limits of the weather, hoping that our actions could actually change the patterns of the clouds in the sky, and hence season.

We ended up in the lawn of a church on Cherry Street. We were in the almost-grass, watching the stars. I complained about a pain in my back; Scott leaned over and massaged my shoulders.

The silence all around soothed me. In that emptiness, I allowed myself to step through those photographs and mirrors that I had feared for so many years. The conditioning that I suffered for most of my life had created rifts in my being and prevented me from creating relationships with other men. I had finally let myself experience the many genders inside myself.

It has taken a lifetime to realize just this: I would rather have a man sleeping next to me at night breathing his warm breath into my inner ear. I am free.