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Views: Dan the Man

**susan
mcmillan**

I wondered where I had gone wrong. Not to sound dramatic but I really wondered. All those years I had thought I was so honest with my family. How did I end up here, sitting on the floor, at midnight, in the darkness of my brother's den in Chicago, trying to make peace with Daniel? It was a silent stand-off with one of the people I love the most in this world.

I'm a long-distance aunt but I try to be a part of the kids' lives. As Daniel grew to become a small person, I learned about a different kind of love. From early on, I loved this boy and his sweet ways from a place in my heart I had not known before. It was unconditional love. No matter what he said or did, I just wanted the world to be good for him. And we were buddies as he grew up — Daniel seemed to actually like spending time with his old Aunt Susan.

For seven of Dan's childhood years, I was involved with Eileen. She was a part of our family, invited as my partner to weddings, expected at funerals. Our relationship was understood by all. Or so I thought. The kids missed her a lot after we broke up. For years they asked about her. It was hard for them to understand why she was not around anymore. Hard to understand, but even in their short lives, they'd seen plenty of divorce, right?

Daniel does not speak much when he is upset. He goes deep inside himself. And so, I found us sitting in that dark office in a silent standoff. Earlier that evening, he'd been in the room while I spoke with my new girlfriend. My family had not yet met Becky. Becky lived in LA, I lived in Alaska, and my family was in Chicago. We'd only been "together" a few weeks. Dan overheard the loving goodbyes uttered by long-distance sweeties and asked who was on the phone. I dove right in with this fifteen-year-old, honest as ever, and explained a bit about meeting Becky in Montana, falling in love, and my plans to move to LA by Christmas.

I expected the nervous reaction of a teenage boy talking with his 40-year-old aunt about something as personal as a girlfriend. Instead, Daniel expressed disbelief. After I made another

attempt to explain that I was *with* this woman on the other end of the phone, Dan simply said, "You're gay?"

His disbelief turned to feelings of betrayal. How could I have kept this from him? How come he did not know? How long had his parents known? The questions poured out. And then the silence. Dan was angry. Maybe rejected. After the years we'd been

life. I confessed it had never occurred to me to say to him, "I am gay and this is my partner."

Daniel and I got through that night. We were emotionally worn out and were not going to talk this through in one sitting. Months later, when Daniel met Becky, he was rude. He was cold and even nasty to her. For the first time, I overheard him ridicule someone by calling them *gay*. How could I explain to Becky that this was the kid I adored? I still could not help but love Dan.

Gradually, over two years, Dan warmed up. Becky got big hugs when coming and going. They had real conversations together. I didn't worry any more about leaving them in the same room alone. Dan seemed easier with us. But nothing prepared me for what happened on another night last spring. Our whole family was sitting around after dinner. We were

Why Not? (by Daniel McMillan)

**The light of day, the dark of night
The colors of gay, bring some people fright.
But to not allow such a simple thing,
such a beautiful testimony of devotion that's outright,
as pledging love with a ring, / just doesn't seem right.**

**So what if they're different, / Are they not still people?
Variety is the spice of life, / and spicy is what this world is.
They may love the wrong sex, / But what does that mean?**

**Everyone has preferences that differ from others,
Why is this one so bad? / Are they not still our brothers?
And sisters and fathers and uncles and aunts,
Why must Bush take this unfair stance?**

**What have they done to us / Except make our world richer.
These people are doctors, and lawyers and pitchers,
But we treat them like outcasts, and unwanted figures.
We call them homos, / and exclaim, "You fag!"
Not even knowing the ways their days drag.
Because we refuse to give them a ceremony so rightfully theirs,
we just give them foul treatment and cold, cold stares.**

friends, how could this detail go undeclared?

I tried to explain: *Eileen was always with me. We always stayed in the same room. We were a pair.* Our relationship was so accepted by the adults in the family I guess I thought the kids would learn by osmosis. At what age should I have *come out* to this child? I apologized to Dan. He had grown up with us so openly in his

discussing Dan's graduation, which was not yet a certainty. Dan offered to show us his senior English class portfolio. As I read this piece, I knew why I would always love this sweet boy, now a fine and thoughtful young man. ▼

Assistant Editor Susan McMillan and her partner will be back home in Vermont from their sojourn in Alaska in the middle of this month.

WOMEN'S CHOICE

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