

Tongue in Cheek: Out There

Every year it's the same dilemma: On October 11, National Coming Out Day, who is there left for me to come out to?

I want to participate. I don't want to feel left out. But it takes two to tango. And I'm fresh out of dance partners. I'm out at my day job, every member of my extended family who remotely matters to me (out to the third cousin level) has met Derek, and I write a column in the gay press. I couldn't get more out without putting on pom-poms and a megaphone and cheering from the street corner. Which might not be the sort of image that the founders of National Coming Out Day had in mind.

So what's a totally out kinda guy supposed to do? Go back in the closet a little, so I can come out again on National Coming Out Day? Would I feel better if I could?

It's a little like what I call the "happy family conundrum." By which I mean that everyone always wants to be part of a happy family, and some of us spend much of the first part of our lives striving in that direction. But it's not always what it's cracked up to be. When we were growing up, my sister and I always longed to be part of a happy family. Then when we got older and spent time around actual happy families, we realized, "Blech! How boring is THAT?!"

I'll never forget the adrenaline rush of running through our house, my sister in hot pursuit with a butcher knife, as I screamed for my parents to stop her. Of course, I had lain in wait in the darkest corner of the kitchen after we'd watched *The Amityville Horror*, and I'd scared the bejeezus out of my sister as she was getting a bedtime glass of milk. I was actually a little surprised she didn't come after me with the electric knife.

Or how we knew never to go near the bathroom when Mom was having newspaper time. It was the one half hour of the day when she could

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have some peace to herself, and no one would come in and bother her with a request. But we wondered — could she at least flush occasionally?

Or how you never knew what my dad would say, or the consequences it could have. Like when the neighbor's 20 year old daughter got a black cat that neatly matched her jet

track down your grandfather with his latest floozy. Your mom would work on her homework, as your grandmother did her best Magnum, P.I. impression. That's why your grandparents got divorced, you know. Your "grandfather never realized he couldn't be married and not still date." Just ask any person who grew up in a happy family if he has any memories that make as good a story as THAT.

So maybe, similarly, being a fully-out gay person is better than being able to come out to someone on National Coming Out Day. Maybe I should accept that I'm in a better place, and find another way to participate instead.

Derek and I have been thinking about adopting an older

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black hair, and Dad called out to her across the driveway, "That's a pretty little black pussy you've got there, Julie!" I still don't think he ever understood why Mr. Judkins was so upset. Or maybe he did and just enjoyed it. After all, the Judkins were rather pretentious folk to have a name like Judkins.

So maybe the less-than-happy families were better after all. At least they were more interesting in terms of future stories: "Yes, dear nephew, I remember how your grandmother used to take your mom out in the Oldsmobile to

child — you know, one just out of med school — but perhaps instead we should just find some not-quite-fully-out twenty-something who needs a cheering section. That way, I could feel like I'm participating in National Coming Out Day again. And I'll bet Derek would look really cute in pom-poms. ▼

Columnist Kevin Isom is the author of It Only Hurts When I Polka and Tongue in Cheek and Other Places, available at bookstores and online. He may be reached at isomonline@aol.com or KevinIsom.com.



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