

Coming Out: "The beginning"

BY WILL HOLDEN

Some people say I came out of the closet one day at lunch, like a spur-of-the-moment thing. You know, "I like cheeseburgers, oh yeah, and men too." Yeah, that must have been it. Some say I came out at a big sports game, which may be true as well. Some say I just went to school one day, and said it when I got there. No matter what story I hear though, it's true that I don't quite remember when I first came out to everyone.

It must have been the rush that made me do it though. The high you get when you completely let loose and announce the dark secrets that you never even dared to mutter under your breath. It must have been because of some spark that gave me that final bit of courage in my daunting task. People don't believe me when I talk to them about the high, and of course they wouldn't. Most of them have never dealt with a secret that large.

Keeping the secret though, that's the all-time low. I try to speak of that as well, but as I said before, no one ever understands. Let's just call it a secret. Yeah. For all intents and purposes, let's refer to it as an everyday secret. Like how Sally is cheating on her boyfriend with Rachael's cousin. Take that little bit of hall gossip, and magnify it by the nth million power.

The feeling I mean, if I may be so bold as to say, is suffocation. It is physical, destructive, and has led to death (just as suffocation in the actual sense has). Every time I would think of a guy I liked, my stomach would tense up, and I'd have a hard time breathing. Occasionally, I would even feel light-headed from the stress. It was almost to the cataclysmic scale that would turn one catatonic.

Nevertheless though, I managed to survive. That's all you really can do in those situations, is survive. Keep yourself breathing, and know that you've got strength somewhere. All that's left now, is to find it.

I found my first bit of strength at my eighth-grade graduation dance. I took my friend Beth, who had been my friend since we had first met in the second grade.

Since we had always paired ourselves up in plays, and other activities, many observers had already made the assumptions that we were dating. So, that night I pulled her aside, and said that I needed to speak to her. She was so nervous at the thought that I may want to dance with her, or something gross

like that. Quite on the contrary. I told her in a roundabout way (You know, "I've never really liked any girls" and all of that such).

It was a way where I wouldn't actually have to say anything, but where she would guess. (This method was one that also helped me later on in my mission.) She reacted quite nicely, though she

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later told her homophobic brother Kyle (who I'm friends with, so he's had to deal with it. That's another story in itself anyways, so let's just save that.).

Though I had already found the strength to talk to my friend Beth, that was only part of the battle. One person though, really gave me the courage to move past the fear, and tell people. Her name was Mimi, and she was a bisexual girl in my class. It was at the largest football game of the year, and I knew that I had already waited too long to say anything.

She was alone in the field, twirling glow sticks. I knew I would need her help, and there was no better time than now. So, I went up to her and told her I was gay. She said that she was glad I had told her, and that she had found strength within herself by realizing that it wasn't important what other people thought. Sure, everyone knows that, and everyone always says that, but this time it was different. She was someone that had been through the same situation I had, and she was someone who actually had confidence in her words.

Then came the high. Yep, like I said earlier. It was that feeling that nothing can touch you, and you can do anything. My friend Nick

came up to me, and I smiled and told him. He didn't seem all that surprised, actually, he sounded like he had already expected this. I should have figured that it wouldn't be as big a deal as I had made it out to be. This was the start of the "Duh, why didn't you say something earlier!" situation that I often found after that. I felt so great about my achievements. I couldn't believe it, and Mimi's wisdom and my telling Nick were two things that would definitely help me do what came next:

My father. He called that night, and I knew I had to tell him. I went to, and even began my sentence, but I couldn't do it. My high had gone suddenly and he spent a few minutes trying to figure it out. It was then that he said it. "Are you worried that you think you're gay?" I quickly hung up the phone, and began to cry.

What a situation! I couldn't say no, and I sure to hell couldn't say yes. He called back, and tried to calm me through my answering machine. After he started talking about coming over to help me, I finally picked up the phone. We talked. Yeah, that's it. All we had to do was talk. It wasn't even that bad once I had managed to calm down and stop my crying.

He told me something that made me a lot more confident. He told me that it was okay if I was unsure about my sexuality, but I told him that I was sure. "I'm gay." He was very supportive, and spoke to me until I was laughing again. The first difficult time over with, now all I needed was ...

Mom. How? She was ... a little less understanding than my father. I wasn't sure how I would get through this. So, after a while of brainstorming, I came up with a plan. "I won't tell her. I don't need to. Aha! I leave a lot of notes to self, and keep separate little notes all over!" That was my way of thinking, and again, I wouldn't have to say a thing. So, I made a special little note to self. About my secret, and how I need help. I can never tell anyone, and blah, blah, blah. (Seriously, I was so over that stage! But I digress.)

Of course, she read it and spoke with me later on that night. It was in her truck, and she seemed to be doing her best to hide how upset she was. She asked me when I knew, and I said that I had been thinking of this for quite some time. She happily stated that thinking isn't knowing, and I reassured her that I knew.

Things were rocky for a while, and we never really talk about it. It's not that I can't speak to my mom, but that it's not really necessary. She knows, and it's not important that I keep bringing it up. I still feel a little worried of talking about my sexuality to her, and when I have a boyfriend, I don't have them meet her.

Don't get me wrong, It's not that I don't want her to meet them, but I don't think she's really ready for that yet. I respect my mom, and I'll continue to respect this boundary for a while, and until I am totally sure that it would be okay with her.

So, when I do have a boyfriend, I never say it. It's implied through how much I speak of them, how I have their picture in a frame on my wall, and how I

act when talking about them. It's all implied, but at least it's there.

I still haven't told everyone, but that's only because I haven't had to. I will though. At least I now know that I have the strength and power to be myself. I don't need to live my life in fear of violence. I don't need to fear persecution from my loved ones. And I don't need to feel that suffocation I once did. I am human, and I need to be loved. Not only do I need to, but I *demand* to be loved. No longer should we live secret lives and die within them either.

All it takes is that one first step, and that one first person you tell, to make a difference. ▼

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