

# YOUTH Zone

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## Coming Out: "Branching Out" By Will Holden

➔ Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series. The first part can be found in our January issue.

So, when I last left off, I had told my friends and parents about my homosexuality. Of course, I must have told others as well, and here are the smaller stories of those people and how I managed to tell them. Working up the courage with these individuals was difficult, but not nearly as daunting as the encounters with my parents. Also note that the highs and lows of my secret hadn't vanished, but had severely gone down from my first days of being closeted.

The first person I would like to mention would be my

stepsister Stephanie. She and I were very close a while back, when her father and my mother had first married. She'd tell me her dirty little secrets and I'd offer my own insight on what the hell was wrong with her. It was a good relationship. It was another day of just the two of us at home. She was talking about going somewhere with her current boyfriend. I wasn't sure how to say what was on my mind, but then let slip that my current boyfriend and I would be going to an event happening in Fair Haven's park.

I said this with a smile and a laugh, and I could tell she wasn't believing me. I usually made jokes, so who could blame her for thinking this was just that. She soon realized that I wasn't joking and proceeded

to cover her mouth to try and cover the "big drama gasp" that soon erupted. She didn't mind it at all, and I knew then that she'd be the one to talk to about boyfriends and gay issues whenever needed.

At this time we no longer live together, and have parted a little bit. She knows I'm gay though, and doesn't mind it still. We laugh and joke about it, and when she sees me with a guy, she always asks if he's "with" me.

My other sister, April, was a different matter in how she found out. I never told her, as I was never quite sure how to work that into a conversation. "Hey April, how are the kids, and-would you look at that guy doing construction!" Yeah...no. Steph dutifully told her though. When that was I am not sure, but April doesn't really care either, which doesn't surprise me much. She's a warm, loving person, and even told me that my "friend", as she called him, could come to her kids' first birthday party.

Moving right along to my dear aunt Maggie. I told her straight out (yeah, pun, let's move right along). It was the day my father got remarried, and she was the one to drive me home from the reception. I asked her if dad had told her I was gay, and the tone of her voice immediately told me no. We spoke a little awkwardly about it for a couple of minutes. She's another sweet person, but I could tell that the suddenness of it really shocked her.

She asked me what others had asked before her. She asked, "what if you wake up tomorrow and you're not gay?" I wanted to tell her that it didn't work like that, or that if it did happen she'd be the first to know. I don't think that I actually mustered out an answer and we never really spoke about that again. I don't think she really minds, but as always, how do you fit that in?

Everyone has that grandmother. You know the one! She quilts and cooks, goes to church and cleans. Watches Lifetime movies, and takes the

morning walks. The one that always smiles and always has a warm feeling. Everyone has that grandmother, but how in the world do you tell them you're gay? Here's the trick I've used before. You don't!

The first part of my article was just about to come out (am I not a funny guy?) in the paper, and she wanted a copy. I knew that I would need to talk to her, but had no idea how to do so. I told my father about this problem, and he called her up that night (without me quite knowing this). He told her what the article was about, but was soon surprised himself. Maggie, from over a year ago, had told grandma about me being gay. This told me two things. One, that Maggie had accepted my sexuality as fact, and two, that grandma was already prepared.

The fact that she had known for a while and not said anything or acted any different, meant to me that she wasn't really bothered by this. Not saying that I thought she was going to go ballistic, I also didn't think that she wouldn't say anything if she did know. She did sound disappointed that I wouldn't have a little girl that looked like an Indian, but let's just skip right along...

My stepmother was a different case than the rest of these family members. I did tell her, a long while back. If memory serves right, it was before she and my father had even married. She didn't really say anything negative, and was seemingly supportive. Well, actually no. She still said that I'd find a nice girl someday and I gave up after a few minutes of "but I don't want a nice girl!"

Time passed and we never really needed to say anything else on the issue. This may have been a bad move on my part. In all actuality, I think she forgot! She's made comments that when I get a girlfriend a lot of my problems will go away, and has also asked if I have one yet. Judging by the tone of her voice, it is hard to understand whether she actually forgot, or if she's just being snide. Either way, it is quite uncalled for. We don't have a really

solid relationship, so I guess I can deal. It is sad though, as she is a part of my family.

There they are, the other key figures that know. Besides my cousin Danny who found out purely by looking into a book I was published in, and seeing my author profile. Also my other cousins, who may or may not know. A lot of loose ends still need tying, and a lot more are still totally unraveled.

You may be wondering what's going on in my world as of now. Well, where I last left off, my father was doing fine with me, and still is. My mother, wasn't so okay with it. I am happy to state a change in situation. The last article may have been misleading, and I'm here to tell you how she's doing now.

Every Wednesday at four, I am in a GLBTQ group (Identity Project) at Rutland Mental Health. It's a small one, but we have enough people to help run it. My mother clears time out of her day every week to take me there, and never really minds it. (The fact that it is in Rutland Mental Health maybe, but the group itself, no.) We have begun getting comfortable and have been making jokes just like my friends and I do. She's come a long way, and I would like to thank my mother for doing so.

Coming out certainly isn't a quick process, nor is it one that may ever end. No matter how old you are, or what position you're in, you'll always have to say to someone "oh yeah, I'm gay". Even though it might never end, at least it truly does get easier and easier over time. That's something that I think a lot of people should look forward to, and should think about when coming out for the first times seem so rough. ▼

➔ Will Holden is a junior at Fairhaven Union High School.

➔ For more information on the group serving Rutland County, contact Karen Grimm at Rutland Mental Health Services, 775-4388.



### Campus Shuts Out Freedom Riders

LYNCHBURG, VA - The Soulforce Equality Ride - a freedom bus ride of 35 young adults scheduled to confront 19 homophobic religious colleges and military academies - will begin here on March 10 at Liberty University. The institution has refused to allow Equality Ride participants to visit the campus, the event's website reports, and further, has threatened arrest if the young riders come onto the campus.

Founded by Dr. Jerry Falwell in 1971, Liberty University serves more than 20,000 residential and off-campus students.

"We remind Reverend Falwell that it was less than 40 years ago that he took similar stands as he denied admission to this church to people of color," said Equality Ride Co-Director Haven Herrin. "Has he forgotten how he called the Civil Rights movement the Civil 'Wrong' movement? It is time that he learn from history and end yet another form of discrimination he practices."

Like the Freedom Rides of the Civil Rights era in the 50's and 60's, the Equality Ride will take a busload of young adults on an eight-week tour of educational institutions that ban the enrollment of LGBT students.

The tour begins with a week of training in Washington DC, then will travel as far as California and wrap up in Washington again at the end of April. ▼

➔ From [www.equalityride.com](http://www.equalityride.com). Also see [Soulforce.org](http://Soulforce.org).