

Coming Out

Torn Two Ways: Confessions of a Bisexual

by Maxwell Keene

In my childhood, I used to run about the woods behind my house pretending that I was the first human being ever to dash through that tall grass, swing from branch to branch in that maple grove, and scamper across the tops of boulders bigger (or so I thought then) than the moon. If I had difficulties communing with people, I had none communing with nature, and so there I lived a great part of my younger days, mostly alone.

I looked to nature (and still do) for many things - answers to questions, confirmations of decisions, companionship in solitude - and sought to find some kind of identity there, some kind of validation. Like the Native Americans whose lives so fascinated me, I listened hard to the wind and the rain on stormy days, struggling to hear if my name, my true name, was being called.

It would only be years later that I would come to fully understand the meaning of the Indian name I eventually chose for myself, "Torn Two Ways." At first, Torn Two Ways was a boy who would long to be a part of society, but would also feel the need to escape and hide, a fearful recluse in the wild world. He would crave companionship, yet find ultimate solace only in being alone.

Years would pass before I would return to define Torn Two Ways as a man. It happened one night as I swam my thrice-a-week mile at a local pool (water, after all, has always been an important catalyst for revelation in my life). Normally I would swim in Lane One, but this night I had arrived rather late and so had to sandwich myself between two swimmers at that side of the pool.

To my left in Lane One was a beautiful blond woman of perfect stroke, swimsuit cut high along the hip, long smooth legs fluttering behind with a kick like flirtation itself. A dedicated swimmer, her strength didn't flag the entire time I was there, and many times I found we were swimming side by side, the underwater current of her movement sending out a teasing warning whenever we came too close. Swimming head-on towards me, she seemed like a goddess, an athletic Artemis, keeper of the hunt and symbol of fertility. Her shape was full like her movement, fluid and graceful, strong and assured.

To my right, in Lane Two, was a lean

young man struggling with his strokes, muscles taut from the effort and red striped swimsuit rippling around his middle as he tore through the water. His styles varied, from the undulating breast stroke which sent him under and up to the back crawl which lifted him, chest arched and glistening just above the surface. If he was on show he was showing it all, from the sturdy cage of that chest to the hard slope of his stomach to the aching strength of his legs.

Back and forth I went between the two.

Which one, I asked myself, would I want most to brush up against in the water? Which one, if I were so bold, would I want most to meet after the swim, either outside at the checkout desk or inside in the locker room? Back and forth I continued between the two, asking these questions, looking first to Lane One, then to Lane Two.

This episode symbolized a great tension I had always felt in my life, an attraction to both men and women, yet rarely had I felt the two so strongly at the same time. The feeling inside was like a great ripping, a desire to halve the heart in my chest and dedicate one part to the man, one part to the woman.

Since that time, I have learned that the two resulting halves of my heart would not be the same in size, for I have become more fully aware that my attraction to men is stronger. In accordance with that, I have chosen to identify myself as a gay man, for there I believe I will find the most happiness in both love and life.

On dedicating myself to life in the gay community, however, I came upon a curious situation. I had resigned myself to the discrimination and mistreatment I would encounter as a gay man in a hetero-oriented society, but was shocked to find that similar discrimination and mistreatment was heaped upon bisexuals in the lesbian and gay community. "Bisexuality is just a dodge," many would tell me. "You're either gay or you're not."

This seemed rather odd, coming as it did from a community which celebrated diversity and sought continuously to shatter traditional myths about sexuality. I had read many studies on sexual orientation, many of them quoted often

by members of the gay community, and most concluded that sexuality should best be viewed as a spectrum, as a continuum ranging from straight heterosexuality to out-and-out homosexuality. Such a spectrum left a lot of room in the middle, and that's where I found myself - in the middle.

I've moved around that middle quite a bit, actually, looking for a comfortable spot to settle in. It is true that I started off trying to convince myself that I was firmly on the heterosexual side, but time pushed me past the center over into the homosexual side. In that respect, bisexuality was an effective way of easing myself into gay life.

At this point in my life I've spent several years dedicated to exploring the "gay-identifying" side of my sexual orientation, for it is without question the stronger side. I have resigned myself to a life without a traditional family, something else which had also exerted a strong pull on my soul. Yet even as I find myself exploring the riches of life as a gay man, my head turns occasionally at the passing of an attractive woman and the tug-of-war inside is renewed. My gay male friends laugh at my behavior and tell me I'm betraying "the cause" when I date women, but there's a part of me that needs that nourishment and seeks fulfillment, even if that only means walking through the woods after dinner holding hands.

Regardless of what I do, it seems there will always be the two ways, and I will always be torn between them. If that means being torn between two communities which both demand full allegiance, then that is the task I must face. But for the moment, I'll just keep plugging away until I've gone the complete mile, and if I don't find the answer by the end of that, tomorrow I'll dive in and do it again.



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