

Brian McNaught Teaches Us to Sing Our Song

Bob Hooker

On Wednesday evening, March 9th, the entire freshman class of Caselton State College caught a one hour glimpse into the life of a man growing up gay in America. Brian McNaught, author, lecturer, and homophobia consultant to several large companies, spoke of his early life in the closet, his coming out

process, and his journey to self acceptance. It is a process and a journey we can all identify with on some level.

McNaught's lecture was part of a series being presented as a required course to the freshman class exposing them to a wide diversity of people, ideas, and life experiences. I find it to be a highly commendable effort at planting the seeds of acceptance in another generation at an impressionable time in their lives.

There was a great deal of food for thought in his presentation. For the straight students who had never really stopped to consider what it is like to grow up as a gay teenager, Brian delivered some stark details, including everything from gay jokes and insults, to gay teen suicide rates. He gave many examples of heterosexist and homophobic remarks and actions that everyone can make a conscious effort to avoid.

As he concluded his talk, he touched on his personal spiritual journey. As often happens, he had a difficult time reconciling his self-discovery with the anti-gay teachings of his religion. He summed up his transition by saying that the god he believes in now is not a god that will condemn him for being a homosexual person, but is a god that will simply ask at the Pearly Gates, "Did you sing the song that I taught you?" If we can all remember to strive to be the best "us" that we can be, we might have a chance at those Pearly Gates too.

I believe Brian has learned to sing his song, and sing it well. It came through loud and clear in his presentation, accenting the human connection of everyone in the room. And the wonderful extended applause at the end actually gave me goose bumps! ▼

Although planned especially for the students, it was open to the public and was attended by 20-30 adult members of the Caselton, Rutland, and Burlington gay communities. As I sat there reflecting on my own freshman year at another Vermont State College 25 years ago, I was struck at how far the straight community has come in that time. When Brian asked the audience how many people had a gay friend or family member, fully half the hall had hands in the air. One of the things that I have found most rewarding in my own coming out process is the supportive responses I have received from my straight friends and family members. It seems, in many cases, if we reach out in love and honesty, that many straight people will be able to begin to accept us as we are. But, of course, as Brian pointed out, first we need to accept ourselves in love and honesty.



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