

TWENTY



SOMETHING

# Do You Remember that Night in September?

BY THOMAS HENNING

What is the deal with New Year's? Everyone gets so excited around this holiday. Everyone is running around making plans of one sort or another and breaking out a list of resolutions for the next 12 months — even though no one could stick to last year's. Am I missing something here?

Don't get me wrong. I am very fond of New Year's Eve. In Greece, it is a bigger holiday than Christmas. Children run from door to door singing a New Year's song for drachmas, and the highlight is cutting a sweet cake that we call Pita. Legend says that if you receive a slice of

Pita with a drachma, it will be a lucky year for you.

The spirit of New Year's is one of love, respect, and hope. I think that this is the time to take a look at the last year and see what individuals and events have made a difference in your life, acknowledge the people who have touched you and whom you are thankful re-entered your life. You know the drill. I mean it, pumpkins. Take a moment from your self-absorbed obsessing about what to wear on New Year's Eve and where to wear it and think about this last year.

You know what I wish? That there was some independent company that annually made yearbooks of our lives. They'd have pictures of the events and

people we were involved with on any level; they'd catalogue our whole year. Imagine, you could be looking at it years later and stumble upon a shot of that person you had some wild September night with that you almost forgot about, or maybe a person that you thought would be your buddy forever but isn't now. Pictures of the two or 12 of you at Margarita night or maybe at the Flynn.

There would be those yearbook inscriptions telling you how much fun you are and just how much you mean. "Keep in touch — I mean it!" Would that not be a kick? I would love it. That is what this holiday is all about to me; it is about remembering. Remembering all those things

that happened in the past years that really helped to shape me. Now this hits a little closer to home for me because I have started to forget things.

As I have written before in past articles, I am the eldest of four boys. One of my younger brothers, Sam, died a little over six years ago. I love him and think about him each day, no lie, but lately I have had trouble remembering. It is harder for me to remember what his voice sounded like or what his nose looked like. I can't remember his laugh and sometimes that tears me up inside.

I remember playing poker, for change, with him on his bed and cheating. I remember picking out outfits for him to wear on picture day in school and

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how he melted my heart with a hug.

I wish I had known that laugh a little better and wish that I had paid attention to all those little things that I cherish so much now that he is not in my life. I can't go back and live those years over again. I can't go back and get in those same snowball fights or relive any of those moments that only come once.

I remember that Sam and I used to play Ice Hockey on Nintendo. He would always choose the US team and I the Greek team. We would sit for hours trying to beat each other and arguing about which team was better. We would tease each other and laugh. I remember that. I don't remember the exact conversations, but I remember that person who I love and miss with all that I have.

This New Year, I will thank the spirits for him and remember what a difference he made in my life. I will then remember all the others who are making a difference in my life, and how, and I will thank them. I will stop from my busy, self-centered life and say the things I know I would regret not saying if they were not around. I will say them because I know that I will never have that chance with Sam. I will never have the opportunity to say to his face that I love him or anything else that I have the opportunity to say to those who are still living.

This is not a dress rehearsal. We have all heard the phrase. It may be corny, but sweet peas, I can't think of a more accurate saying. We have the opportunity to live each day only once, so why not make the most of it? Do what we want to do and be who we know we can be. Live a life that we can look back on and say, "Wow, that was me. That is my life and I am proud and thankful for it." Happy New Year, pumpkins, and many more. ▼

## PROGENY



OUR CHILDREN &amp; FAMILIES

BY TIM EVANS

I am 43 years old and have been "out" for about seven years. I've always known that I am gay. I think back to when I was nine or 10 years old and having crushes on great-looking male characters on television. My attraction to men has never been in doubt, but my ability to act upon it used to be something that I figured would not be in my future. In high school I developed huge crushes on some of the guys; the loneliness and frustration of not having anywhere to go with that feeling led me to compensate with alcohol and drugs.

For the next 18 years my secret remained intact, although at times friends would occasionally confront me about not ever having a girlfriend. My mother would suggest I find "some rich lady" to settle down with. I never knew what to say to this and would mumble some lame excuse about not being comfortable around girls or that I had a hard enough time taking care of myself, let alone a girlfriend.

When the drinking finally ended (that is another story), I confronted my homosexuality for the first time. I began to think to myself, "Why can't I be out in the world?" and to entertain the thought that maybe, just maybe, I could find a man to fall in love with.

Well I did find a wonderful, kind, handsome man and fell in love. Robert is someone who I can feel completely comfortable

with — a soulmate. I shared my relationship with Robert with one of my brothers — and in the process came out to him. His reaction was fairly unemotional but accepting. The rest of my family heard about Robert, but as "just a friend." I had yearned

at my brother's house in Connecticut! I accepted the invitation and began to see this as the golden opportunity to come out to my entire family as a gay man with a loving partner. Robert and I made plans to drive to Connecticut and make our

coldness. For years, I feared telling my parents I am gay, terrified about how they'd react; then there I was with my entire family as a gay man in a relationship with another man! At different times my father and mother each sat next to Robert and talked with him; he and my mother had a wonderful discussion about making and stenciling curtains. When it came time to leave, we both got lots of hugs and comments such as "too bad you couldn't stay longer." I could not have imagined a more accepting scenario.

So what to gather from all of this? Perhaps the most important feeling I got was that so much time goes by and we often become frozen by our fears of the unknown. In my case I was living under the assumption that my family, and especially my parents, would not accept me as a gay man and would somehow show their disapproval. Whether that disapproval would be overt anger or, more likely, an intolerable silence, I was too afraid to risk finding out.

Although my family and I will probably never be as close as some, I now feel a sense of belonging and a "part of" that I don't think was ever there before. This is truly a moment I will cherish and grow upon. While I realize not all family coming-out experiences will produce the same results as mine, I believe the best way to go is to face that awful fear, take a chance, and find out before it is too late. ▼

to come out to my entire family for a long time; now that Robert was in my life, the urge to was becoming too great to suppress.

Along came my birthday in 1998. My parents came to visit and invited Robert and me out to dinner. I was sure if they suspected that I was gay and Robert was more than a friend, and they were uncomfortable with that, then they would not have extended such an invitation. So we accepted and the evening went fine! There were no uncomfortable lapses in the dinner conversation, no unexpected or rude comments. My parents are older folks and live by an ethic of good manners (something I like to think got passed on to me).

The next day, as we said our good-byes, my mother invited us both to Thanksgiving dinner

first Evans family appearance as a couple on Thanksgiving Day.

I thought I should explain or come out directly to my parents before we arrived on the big day. So I sent my mother a thank-you note for the birthday dinner, explaining that Robert and I are partners and hope to share a home together soon. Suddenly my "secret" was in writing and in my parents' hands.

We were both excited and a little nervous on the long drive to Connecticut. I'd gotten no reply to my note and wondered if this was a bad sign. On arrival at my brother's house, we were greeted with the familiar smells of turkey and squash and pies all baking and simmering at once. Various family members bustled about in the kitchen but stopped to warmly welcome us.

There was no hostility or

## Not Outcast, Just Out

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