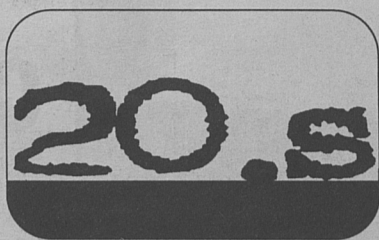


feature

TWENTY SOMETHING
by thomas henning



A Blueprint of Another Color

Pumpkins, a new era has dawned, and hopefully we have all survived. It seems to me that the new century provides us with the opportunity to take stock in our lives and really come up with an updated set of blueprints.

Now, you know me. I am all about self-examination of all kinds. I think of myself as a puzzle. I look at all the pieces, and each day, I sit at the table of life and spend some time trying to see which pieces fit together and what those pieces are creating. It is frustrating, like a real puzzle can be, but it is also very rewarding.

For example, when I was very young, I was molested by a close family friend. It went on for a few years and was very complicated. The man was an adult who showered me with attention and affections and spent his energies allowing me to be me, free of judgment. He would listen to what I had to say, buy me things, take me places. He would also fondle me while I pretended to nap, have me rub his genitals, or place my head on his lap in an attempt to nap.

This sexual assault was the price I thought I had to pay in order to receive love. I didn't fully understand what was going on, and I was so desperate for love that I sacrificed my safety. I remember one night, after he had taken me to the movies, we were driving home and I had my hand on the door in case I had to open the door while the car was in motion to

escape an attack.

I continued this relationship until one day, after taking me for a ride, he drove behind a strip mall in mid-afternoon and began to assault me. It was on a Sunday in Massachusetts, and everything was closed. I tried to stop him, and I remember him saying, as I struggled, that it was no use, because no one would hear me scream. It was then that I realized it was serious. He was right. No one was around, and he was so much stronger than I was. I was 12 and the abuse had been going on for years.

I blamed myself. To be completely honest, I still blame myself. I thought that if I just let him hug me, maybe dry kiss me, rub me, whatever, he would love me. He would tell me that I was good enough, that I deserved to be loved. I knew he looked at me in a way other adults didn't. I knew that it was odd that he wanted to take naps in the middle of the afternoon with me or touch me.

I also knew that I craved the approval of adults. I wanted to be loved and valued, and I didn't feel that way.

I love my parents, but they were young and didn't know what the hell they were doing. They loved me they just didn't know how to do that unconditionally. As a result I would spend the rest of my childhood and my adulthood to this point believing that I was not good enough. That I was defective, an embarrassment, an object, or a reminder of what could have been but never was.

This family friend knew that and took a vulnerable little boy and manipulated him. I never told my parents. I thought that it would only make them more disappointed. I thought that if I kept my assailant preoccupied he wouldn't move on to my younger brothers. That day behind the strip mall was his ultimatum, either my brothers or me.

What does all this have to do with puzzle pieces? Well,

you see one of the things I have just recently realized is just how that impacted my life. That event has been a driving force in how I view so many things – the way I feel the need to protect friends and family, the way I view sex as a tool to acquire external power to compensate for my feelings of inadequacies, my strong desire to be loved that is deeply tangled with my fear of being loved, and of course my deep desire to please others, even if it means harming myself. Pieces of a puzzle, that is me, coming together to show me myself.

Having that insight, I have been able to alter my blueprint to create a more stable structure. I have come to terms with that area of my past and have taken a look at steps to break the cycle of self-loathing I have engaged in. All too many times, we carry demons from our past. The struggle of growing up GLBT is only one of them, but it is an important one. It is my belief that if we are to be a healthy community, we must invest the time in ourselves to be healthy individuals. If we are to understand and respect each other, we need to understand and respect ourselves.

What this means to me is that we can't always be happy with ourselves or the things we do. We can't always be com-

fortable. Pumpkins, you may feel the need to blow smoke up your neighbor's ass, but I don't see where that gets us. If we don't challenge each other and engage in conversations that helps us put pieces of our collective puzzle together, who will? Who will take a look at our collective blueprint and evaluate how sound that structure is?

It is our responsibility to know our history and understand how that impacts our present. Our responsibility to go out in the community and research the answers to our questions and not rely on others to tell us the answers. It is not easy, it doesn't always feel good but if we are truly going to hold others responsible, then we better hold ourselves responsible.

I could spend a lifetime being angry, feeling victimized, and blaming my behaviors on the sins of others. All that does is let me avoid responsibility and keep me in an oppressed state. I don't want that for myself. I want to enter this new century with ownership, understanding, and sense of control over what affects me in my life. My question to you: how will you enter this new century, and why?

(Located in the same space as Jerome the Florist)

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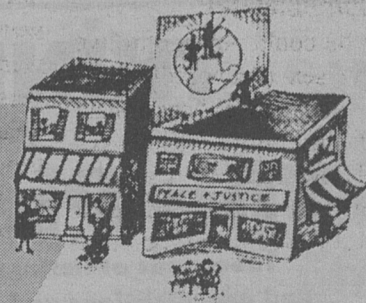
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