Finding Home
By Ben Edgar Williams

So here it is 1986. I am sitting bored to death at my desk, in my office cubical, sorting through endless reams of paper, enduring the tediousness and loneliness that is my life. It feels like tiny needle jabs of a slow death. Don’t get me wrong. I have co-workers with whom I interact, but they are mostly misfits like me.

In this mostly Mormon office, I find that these mentally cloistered people are very distrustful of people like me, someone without a solid Utah pioneer connection. So I don’t fit in! I am fine with that. In fact I am almost smug about not having relatives who crossed the plains. So what if I came to Utah on a Greyhound bus and not dragging a ratty old handcart across Wyoming?

For some reason, today this incessant office chattering about all things Mormon is driving me mad. More than usual.

I do not care where you went on your mission.

I do not care how many kids you have.

I do not care that your ward is being split.

I do not care.

I do not.

Does that make me a bad person?

Sometimes I am gripped with fear that my life is nearly half over and I have never really lived. Marriage, kids, a mortgage. Life just seems to be a constant series of trials and errors which ultimately, I suppose, lead us to a dead end. At times, I feel so alone that I am dead already.

At the end of the day I cross the street at 200 East, and walk a block south to seek out the warmth of the City Main Library. I love the library. I love libraries. I love the long central escalator that ascends past a two story mural that is swathe in blues of every hue.

I take the escalator to the third floor where the art books, record collections, and an atrium are housed. The third floor is generally empty and the space near the elevator is secluded where I can see but not be seen. You might wonder why I like this particular spot. It is a perfect place to sit and watch men darting in and out of the secluded 3rd floor men’s room.

Men’s rooms. Why do gay men cruise men’s rooms? Well why do people rob banks? Because it’s where the money is. Ipso facto. It’s because that’s where the men are.

So as I am flipping through an oversize book, when a rather tall, slender, ginger looking man walks by me. He smiles, ever so slightly as to acknowledge my presence… or did he just flirt?

The dashing young fellow slowly saunters over to the men’s room, and before rounding the corner, turns his head back over his shoulder and glances again my way. This time with a look that begins a stirring in my
trousers. I find that my heart is beating rapidly and my pulse seems to be racing. Am I having a heart attack? Can you have an erection and heart attack at the same time?

But I wait. Maybe it’s just my imagination. I wait a good ten minutes to calm myself down and to see if the ginger was there just to relieve himself. But experience tells me no one takes the escalator to the 3rd floor men’s room just to pee.

When there’s no sign of my enticer emerging from the men’s room, I felt almost compelled to go into the John myself. To my credit, I do believe I had a brief struggle with moral conscience.

He is standing at the outside urinal, forcing me to wedge myself between him and the gray speckled partition. I believe this was his plan. Fumbling, I unzip and stand next to him. I begin to feel exhilarated and guilty, yet excited and scared. I’m so conflicted by my horniness. Part of me wants to zip up and flee but as if my shoes are magnetized to the floor, I cannot leave my post. I am a statue. He is a statue. We stand as rigid as our cocks.

Before there is any chance at any fondling, the heavy wooden latrine door opens and around the corner comes a man, slightly older than myself. He is blond with a scruffy beard. He appraises the ginger and I as he stands by the porcelain sink watching the two of us intently as if we were prey. He crosses his legs and leans one arm on the sink as casual as can be. Was he an undercover cop? Was he vice? I am scared shitless but I cannot leave. I cannot take my eye off the turgid member that was swelling in the hands of the ginger hair kid next to me.

No one is moving. Scruffy man leaning against the sink, just watches. Time stood still as we stood cocks in hand glancing furtively at Mr. Scruffy who now was beginning to rub his hand across his own crotch.

Then to my astonishment and somewhat horror, the ginger at my side slowly gyrates to show our scruffy intruder what he is holding in his hand. The scruffy dude grins and says “I have a place. You guys want to come?”

Holy hell! I am being cruised by two incredibly handsome strangers when just a few hours before I was reflecting and bemoaning on how predictable my life was! While the ginger said “sure thing man,” I was unable to utter the words that is leading me to certain debauchery. With words caught in my throat, I find myself frantically nodding in the affirmative.

We follow Mr. Scruffy in silence, braced for the cold, and we hop into his fast-food-wrappers-strewn Chevelle for the quick jaunt to the Ben Albert Apartments on 5th East. Perfect! Exactly the place I would expect for this type of sordid escapade.

The elevator bell dings at the fourth floor. We follow closely behind the scruffy blond man into what appeared to be an unkempt studio apartment. Then he turns to Ginger and I and says, “Hi. I’m Randy,” as he grabbed the ginger’s crotch.

I bogus out a name, not my real one for sure, and I’m not really sure Randy is really Mr. Scruffy’s name either, or that Ken is the ginger’s real name. Who cares? It didn’t seem at the time to matter as we ravenously fell upon each other in a scramble to remove each other’s clothes. Shoes are kicked off across the floor. Belts are unbuckled. Shirts pulled over our heads. Pants frantically unbuttoned and tugged off and then pushed aside. With reckless abandonment we fall upon the unmade bed that seems to engulf the entire studio. Warm tongues begin to seek tongue and flesh. Hands grope inside the waist bands of underwear, searching and finding firmness and rigidity struggling to be freed of its cotton confinement.
We release our pent up masculine lust, desire, and heat. Thickets of red and blond pubic hair, some soft, some wiry, brush against my cheek. Musk, sweat, testosterone pheromones perfume the nostrils as fingers scramble through chest hair, nipples firm, erect and pliable. Flesh pressed upon flesh, engorged members throbbing, demanding, pleading to be released. A tangle of legs and arms a triad of body parts. We devoured each other’s passion, hungry for heat and fluids until we erupted. Until our seed was spent.

Softly panting, in stillness now, the three of us lay in each other’s arms.

As we lie in our lovers’ bed, connected now by a bond particular to gay men, we began to talk aimlessly about our work, our feelings, and oddly enough even about the relationship each of us had with our fathers. We begin to talk about what it means to be gay. Our experiences about being gay men. We find ourselves talking!

Reflectively Ginger asked softly, “Do you guys ever feel scared?”

“Of being gay?” I say.

He struggled to voice his meaning. “Yeah,” he said, “Probably, I don’t know. Maybe something else. I just feel scared to be gay sometimes. You know because of the gay cancer thing.”

Mr. Scruffy and I become silent as if a long shadow had fallen upon us. We knew we shared the same unspoken fear, that something is stalking us, hunting us, even as we revel in being young and alive.

“AIDS”, Mr. Scruffy said, “not Gay Cancer,” adding, “it’s the unwanted interloper lurking under every bed we make love in.”

At that chilling point I notice how late it is getting. “I have to leave,” I told them.

They sit up, hold onto my arm as if reluctant to say goodbye, and I pull away to find my clothes. I hear Mr. Scruffy mutter as in a lament, “Married.”

As I walk briskly out into the cold air, snow begins to fall, pale against a black sky. I walk the three blocks down to catch the last bus out of the city. I am smiling from a secret. Just 15 minutes ago I was not wearing any clothes. Blood rushes to my face with that thought making me tingly and warm and rosy.

The last bus finally wheels to a stop. The door panels squeal as I step on the platform. I smile. I think of the communion and brotherhood that I experienced at the Ben Albert with strangers who yet were not strangers. They were my own kind, my tribe, my folk. I realize then that the bus wasn’t really taking me home. Home is with people like me. I knew then someday I will find my way home permanently. But for right now, I feel alive. And that is enough for me to change my world.