Stories by Utah’s LGBTQ Community and Their Straight Allies – Utah’s Other Pioneers
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Introduction

In the summer of 2013, sitting around a lovely luncheon table in the Avenues home of Andrea Globokar, 3 people met to create a joint project between Art Access and Sage Utah. They talked a long time about Queer Storytelling, and the need for it, lack of it in Utah, and the fact that these precious storytellers are Utah’s Other Pioneers. Pioneers for having forged a life inside of Utah, for having held on, survived, lost and won, fought and feared, and left as witnesses to the power of struggle, choice, change, and love. A project plan was born that day, and the project was to manifest in three different phases. Visual art and creative writing classes taught by Darren Young and Charles Frost. A visual art show that was held during Pride Festival 2014. The choosing of the most diverse writing—to be reformed and refined into a theatrical staged reading.

Writers submissions came from a multi-generational LGBTQ and straight allies, in the forms of expressed poetry, prose, comedy, drama, free-form expressionism, and many others styles.

The readings you are about to hear bridge many themes; love and loss, coming out and outcomes, cruising, Boomers and the emergent Queer Generation, Marriage in all its forms, death and moving on, Curiosity and Cruising, Shame and Patriarchy, AIDS, Gay Men and the Women (AND MEN) they love, Gay parenting, abuse and other themes. Most importantly this staged reading is about pathways, byways, roads, journeys — to survival, courage, and authenticity.

This production is dedicated to all our LGBTQ brothers and sisters in ZION, our chosen family, all who had important lives, all who had amazing stories, most of them unable to ever share those vital stories.

We now present INTERSECTIONS.
In the Beginning
“Us” by Richard Clegg

In the war against us
Shots were fired
At Me, “You should have been a girl”
At Him “Boys don't like that kinda stuff”

He at odds in his own theater of war (Provo),
I in mine (Magna)

Grenades were lobbed
Him “You color just like a girl”
Me “Worthless piece of shit”

Machine gun fire
Homo, fairy, faggot, sissy

Artillery exploded all around us
"You run just like a girl"
"Why don't you play ball like the other boys?"

The smell of sulfur; gunpowder and brimstone from the pulpit
"Whores! Adulterers! Murderers! Fornicators! Homosexuals!"
“All an abomination! All going to hell!"

Is it true? Am I the same as a murderer?

In the war against our tiny fragile souls
We took cover
As if in muddy trenches shuddering with fear
As if in bomb shelters confused. "What's this I feel?"
In closets smelling of Old Spice or Evening in Paris
Which was ours?

We took cover
He Under the bed
I Behind Drapes

In the war against us
They took us hostage
He "I mustn't tell"
Me "I have to be like the others"
Us "They can't discover, they can't know."

In the war against us there were deforming injuries
He guards himself from love,
Confidence is never mine.

In the war against us, like the Gingko Post Hiroshima,
We survive no, we do more than survive
We triumph! Separately - individually

Then

Friends introduce us

We touch and brush angel's wings
We kiss and grow hard, lie naked together like spoons
Avoiding the wet spot

He plays McDonald and Chopin, I listen breathlessly
I sketch, he admires
We suck flesh high in Saffron Heaven
We delight in Liaisons rhymed with raisins
We take roads not taken, dance with the panther
And hear a fly buzz

We watch our lust mirrored
We are entertained by Uncles Carlchen and Vanya
We were mesmerized by Maya's plies
I cook, he does the dishes
We tease viciously any and all intruder's pant legs
We've fought, twice
We ride on Walkyrie wings and shudder at
"Nun denn allein?!"

We, I trust, have never strayed
His brother dies and he weeps in my embrace

We are lost in Fes el Bali
We weep in the Taj Mahal and worship in Lorenzo's Chapel

Our hands touch and a thousand doves take flight
Choices
By Sim Gill

We choose things. I choose a cup of coffee, dark roasts over lights are my preference. I am partial to full bodied reds over minerally whites. A little fat in cooking goes a long way to adding flavor which I will favor over anything that is diet or lite based.

I choose to read certain genre of authors, subjects or books. There are musical artists and periods that just seem to move me. Muddy Waters, Howlin Wolf, CCR are some of my favorites but old Motown sound can't be beat.

We choose the names of our kids, the movies we watch, the cars we drive, the things we eat, the people we vote for or the causes we support.

We do not choose the families we are born into, the color of our skin, the genetic makeup of our biological predispositions. We do not choose our attractions. We experience the negation of our choices, that is, we know what we are not attracted to but cannot overcome the naturalness of our attractions.

This is why a person knows, feels without thought, the attractive pull intuitively. There is no choice. There is no conscious, daily, affirmation every morning that says I want to confirm that I am attracted to ____ lest somehow I forget (and inadvertently, arbitrarily find making come hither to eyes at someone).

Here is an example; when a person suffers from Alzheimer's or dementia in old age the core of learned and willed moments of our history lose their focus, their contours, their fixed clarity. Our history literally vanishes before our eyes and from our memories. No one has to choose their attraction as the history of their memories fade. The biological identity continues without thought. That is the nature of innate attraction. Nobody asks do I like men or women? The body tells the mind what it already knows.

However, there are things that are within the scope of our choices. We choose our ignorance, our learned and nurtured fears, our suspicions, our exclusions, our benevolence of shared concerns, inclusive offering of acceptance or rejection and the alienating tones directed towards others. Yes, indeed, we choose the suffering we inflict, the shame we impose, the hurt we foster, the pain we present and depth in which we bury our heads, minds and souls.

Yes, indeed, who would not want to choose for themselves others mockery, bullying behavior, shame, fear and alienation? Who would not want to choose anxiety, loss of love, public and private rejection, perpetual fear of discovery, the ever present risk of being fired, never loving someone, a life of painful hurt and the unanswered question to God why do I deserve this? Yes, if such choices were possible who would choose this as a life for themselves?

In such realities the choice is clear. I either choose to accept who I am or I do not. I choose to love myself as someone worthy of being loved or I do not. I choose self-respect over self rejection. I choose dignity over despair. I choose living over dying for your sins of misunderstanding. I choose to live not exist in the shadow of your fear and your doubt. I choose to love not to lie.

If choose I must, then, I choose to LIVE not merely to EXIST as some condescending gift that is not within your power to grant. I choose to not give you that power any more.

Yes! This is my choice!
Marriage in My World
By Babs De Lay

Up until recently, BIG GAY WEDDINGS were about as rare as a good hair day for Donald Trump. As an officiant for the Universal Life Church, I’ve married hundreds of LGBT couples in the last 30 years here in Zion. For decades, all I could do was hand the brides or grooms a pretty document I made to commemorate the special day. Now, I can sign their actual license. I’ve been involved in myriad weird and wild weddings. There was the one with the two naked Leathermen who presented each other rings, but not rings meant to be worn on the finger; the hot summer wedding with the two overweight brides AND me balancing on a home-made wooden platform in the middle of a swimming pool; and then there’s the woman who wanted her cats to be married before they produced her a litter. Personally, I don’t have many rules for when I officiate other than the words said out loud are life affirming and my payment goes to the charity of my choosing.

The first gay wedding ever aired on TV was on the Fox sitcom Roc in 1991 (when Richard Roundtree’s character got hitched to another man). In 1995 Martin Mull’s character on Roseanne married his partner, to be followed a year later with Friends having a lesbian wedding. Now, with legalized marriage in so many states, a whole new wedding economy is being created. What with, same-sex wedding cake toppers, trans-tailored bride’s dresses, LGBT-friendly reception centers and vacation getaways, etc., etc. This is not anything I could have ever predicted when I was young and full of cum. My own romantic history is layered.

I am one of the folks who got married on December 20th, 2013 here in Salt Lake City. Yeah, third time is the charm! On that fated snowy day the news that Utah same-sex-couples COULD get married was flying around faster than grass going through a goose. My Mormon, bishopric-serving attorney called me on the phone and said, “GET THEE TO THE CLERKS OFFICE NOW!” We ran down to 2100 South State St., parked, and raced television-cameramen and reporters to the Salt Lake County Clerk’s Office. None of us were headed the right way, but smiling county workers pointed us in the right direction. Unfortunately, we ended up in line right behind the big GAY JIM DEBAKIS wedding. Mr. Nervous Nudnik (a.k.a. Jim) was trying to fill out his marriage license application, talk to reporters, kiss his husband to be, arrange his boutonniere, take his ritalin AND not cry – all at the same time. All we could do in the gridlock, with our completed paperwork in hand, was stand behind Jim and his husband and grumble, “Get on with it boys, we want to get married too! Get out of the way already!” Finally we maneuvered around the cameras and the press. We presented our application to the lovely county employee. She asked us, “Who’s marrying you?” I blurted out, “Me? You?” Calmly she told us that we had to go find an officiant and come back once we were married.

OMG OMG OMG. We left, more like RAN from the tiny Clerk’s office to only face a huge wall of anxious same-sex couples and press in the hallway. We heard there were ministers and officiants arriving downstairs that would happily marry people. We were headed that direction, when we ran smack dab into Mayor Ralph Becker his press entourage and handlers. “Hey Mayor, can you marry us?” I yelled. “Um, uh, I don’t know what to do yet. I’m supposed to go marry Debakis!”

“Um, uh, I don’t know what to do yet. I’m supposed to go marry Debakis!”

“Well, go do that, then!” we both said.

Downstairs people were everywhere laughing, screaming, crying, pointing, running, posing. Someone pointed out cute Christopher Wharton standing in a corner. He’s a local attorney who not only sports a bow tie but doesn’t even look like he’s graduated high school yet. Chris waved his invisible magic wand over us and signed our license. We raced back upstairs and weaseled ourselves back into the crush of
people. I handed the paperwork to one of the staff and asked, no, begged her if the document could be of public record by 5 PM that day. Because, who knew if yet another court would overturn the ruling in ten minutes? She smiled and replied, “I guarantee it!”

My wife Bella and I had gotten married a year earlier at our beloved Burning Man. Our wedding wasn’t legal in the state of Nevada at that time but it meant just as much for us to do it there as anywhere else. It was not stressful like our Utah wedding, and it was so much more beautiful. We have gone for years to the big dance in the desert. We camp with a special group of people who hail from Portland, Alaska, Reno, San Francisco, Denver and San Diego. There’s about 50 of us who bring out RVs and big shade tents. We rent a bio-diesel generator to keep us all running. We provide music and rides to fellow Burners on our art car the “Surly Bird.”

I had proposed to my wife the previous year via a sticky note. I had hid it in the Altoid box she always carried in her pocket. We had long-distance dated for several years before our Burning Man wedding. She lived in Portland, I live here. Every other week, either I was there or she was here, and we often would leave sticky notes hidden for the other while the other was away. Goofy romantic we are, I know.

A wedding on the Playa at Burning Man is special beyond words. Everyone is invited! They happen at any time day or night, in the dirt, on top of art, in tents, or even on an art car. The two of us scoped out the art that year. We found an amazing two story lotus flower made completely out of different colored bottle caps. The artist collected these bottle caps from all around the world. While he was making his project, he’d shout out on his social network things like “Drink more Corona’s people-I need those blue & yellow caps!” or “Red CAPS Red! Drink Red Stripe!”

Our bestie, Patty Cakes had agreed to perform the ceremony. Our camp came dressed in their Burning Man finest; 1970’s tuxedos, faux fur coats, wide bell bottoms and the like. We all hopped aboard the two story Surly Bird and crawled out to the bottle-cap lotus (going 5 MPH only because it’s the law!) Being two creatures of strong will, with 50+ equally amazing friends, we manifested what is known at Black Rock City as a TOTAL WHITE OUT! The afternoon winds had kicked up. Light-yellow, acidic, talcum-powder like fine dust was whirling all around us. Visibility was less than 20 feet. The vows were yelled, the deed was done, the corks were popped and the dusty hugs & kisses ran through the night to the thumpa thumpa of the DJ’s good beats.

As we crawled around the Playa later that night, we were followed by well-wishers. A couple dozen bike riders in monkey masks cruised in our dust. they, then mixed in with other bikers who were dressed as bananas. “STAY IN A BUNCH” became our new battle cry for the rest of Burning Man.

We got the stamped wedding license for Utah’s marriage in the mail about two weeks after we turned in the paperwork. We framed it! It hangs almost like a Mezuzah on our wall at home. Every time one of us walks by we tend to kiss our fingers, reach out and touch the thing. It is by far our most valuable possession.
Second Time is the Charm
By Alex Stuart

I’ve always been someone who cares a great deal about the feelings of the people around me. For as long as I can remember, I’ve been a helper and a healer. Maybe it has something to do with me being an empath … you know, someone who can sense the emotions of others. I’m pretty sure that’s why I’ve always gravitated toward jobs that allowed me to help and heal. That’s also why the name appearing in the byline of this story isn’t my real name. I chose to use a pen name because I’m sensitive to the feelings of the central character of this affair… which happens to be my mom. I know she can handle being “outed,” but the truth is that I still have my own residual issues with coming out. This is as much about me as it is about her. This is our story.

I came out to my mom in the summer of 1986. I had just graduated from high school and I was madly in love with a man I met just a few months before. I hadn’t planned on coming out, but earlier that day the guy I thought was my boyfriend had informed me that I was merely a diversion. I was a fun and enthusiastic diversion, but a diversion nonetheless. When I learned that he had no intention of pursuing a relationship with me, I was devastated. It was the first time I had experienced the type of heartache that threatened to crush my insides and leave me an empty shell, a mere shadow of my former self.

My mom knew something was wrong the moment I walked through the door, and like every mother who knows when a teenage child is in pain, she was wise enough to give me the space I needed until she sensed I was ready to talk. When the time came, she found me and opened the conversation by saying, “There’s something you want to tell me.”

I was so shocked by her greeting I didn’t know what to say. How could she know? Then I realized that she didn’t know, but I also knew that this was the perfect time to tell her of my feelings. So I told her. Sure, I was gripped by the same fear that seizes any gay man when he comes out to a deeply conservative and religious parent, but that didn’t matter. My life was over. The man with whom I had spent several months exploring my sexuality had rejected me. How could things possibly get worse?

My mom listened and merely accepted what she heard without comment. Her only question - perhaps asked to satisfy her curiosity - was what role I played in the relationship. In other words, she wanted to know if I was a top or a bottom. I was tempted to say that I was a “toppom,” but since the only orifice I had used to that point was my mouth, my response was that things don’t always work out that way, and then we left the conversation hanging. After several moments of awkward silence, my mom hugged me, told me that she still loved me, and left me alone.

I was relieved and I was hopeful, but what I didn’t realize was that her reaction was the shit before the fan... and when it hit, it was messy. The next few years became a living hell as my mom went full out evangelist on me. Her religious training took over and she did her best to turn me from my evil ways. My reaction? Like any self-respecting gay man, I returned the favor. I created my own drama and I went as far as I could off the deep end. It was an ugly time for both of us, and I’m certain that the only reason why our relationship survived was because we respected each other. We pushed each other’s boundaries and buttons, but we never crossed the line of no return.

Our conflict ended when I went through a particularly nasty breakup. I was only 20, but I had already grown tired of unstable relationships and what I perceived to be a dysfunctional community. The only real experience I had with the queer community was the bars and hookups at parks. I had no idea just how diverse and sophisticated the community really was, but that didn’t matter. I was over it. I wanted a different life.
That was the opening my mom had been waiting for. She used my disillusionment to introduce me to LDS Social Services and the world of reparative therapy. At the time, I saw it as a godsend. FINALLY! I thought I understood why I was attracted to men, and I saw a way out of my misery. I fully immersed myself in the therapy, and within months I had become a leader within the movement. I was held up as a poster boy of how any gay man could change his sexual orientation. I was the perfect example of how you could “pray the gay away.”

In spite of all the therapy and prayers, my attraction to men remained. Over time I wanted to explore my sexuality again, to build a life of my choosing with someone I truly loved. The problem was that I still lived at home, I was active in the LDS church, and my mom was convinced that I had been “cured” of my same sex attraction. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that I was still attracted to men, that I hated myself for feeling the way I did ... and that I had gone out with a few guys from my support group. I couldn’t say that aside from learning how to build healthy relationships, the only good thing I got from reparative therapy was an awesome blowjob.

I felt trapped with no way out, but I knew that the trap was of my own making. I was the one who wanted to change my orientation. I was the one who wanted to be the good Mormon boy. I was the one who wanted to please God. I built my prison with my own hands, locked the cell, and threw away the key. I made sure that I had burned all of my bridges, and I knew that the moats surrounding my dungeon were too dangerous to cross. I hated myself for being so thorough in my attempt to change my sexual orientation ... but I hated myself even more for believing that I could.

I was miserable and I wanted to escape, and I started to seriously think about suicide. But then my job transferred me out of state. I realized that here was my chance to go where I could truly be myself, so I grabbed the opportunity with the desperation of someone being rescued by helicopter from a sinking ship.

I have to say that those were happy years for me. I made many new friends, and yes, I even went a little guy crazy... well, a LOT guy crazy. I admit I was a slut, but I eventually came to my senses when I realized that I wasn’t going to find happiness in a club or some random hookup. Happiness had to come from within, so I changed course and I focused on healing myself. It was during those healing years that met the man with whom I still share my life.

Unfortunately, my “happily ever after” story took a detour when my mom’s health started to decline and my partner and I both lost our jobs. After speaking at length about our options, we decided to relocate to Utah. I admit that I was NOT enthusiastic about returning, especially since I had spent nearly two decades cultivating my mom’s blissful illusion that my gay was still prayed away. If I returned, she would learn that my partner was more than just my roommate. I would have to come out a second time, and THAT thought gave me many sleepless nights.

My partner and I moved in with my mom and we spent several months sleeping in separate rooms. At first, it was fun, because our illicit trysts were a great boost for our sex life. After a while however, we realized that we needed our own space. Tension started to build between my partner and me, and that tension was made worse by my continued efforts to keep our relationship a secret from my mom. That’s when I realized that by trying to please my partner, my mom, and keep a secret, I was neglecting myself.

I made my decision. This was MY life, and I was not going to let ANYONE else run it for me. I didn’t want my mom to suffer, but how fair was it to me to commit emotional suicide just to preserve someone else’s happy illusion? No more. It was time to care about me. I had a wonderful relationship, and I was not going to see it destroyed by my anxieties.

Coming out once was bad enough, but twice? It sucked. All of the trauma and drama that was missing from the first reveal came up in the second round. This time however, instead of reciprocating, I just let...
my mom exhaust herself... but while she was doing that, she helped me to complete the healing process I began many years before. You see, I hadn’t realized that even though I had escaped from a self imposed prison, I was still wearing the shackles that kept me chained to the wall. Telling my mom that she needed to respect my decisions liberated me from my fearful, self loathing past, and in the process... I learned to love myself.

I now have a great relationship with my mom, and my relationship with my partner is better than it’s ever been. I never in my wildest dreams thought that I would have to come out twice, but now that I look back, I’m glad I did. I’m now showing others how they can heal from their experiences with reparative therapy, and I’m a happier, stronger, healthier person. For me, the second time was the charm.
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 tediumness 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 can not 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 rigidness 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 scrabble 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.
My People
By Maggie Snyder

It was my silent efforts
At social justice
For “My People”
Who needed medical care
In a time
Where there
Was none.

No Social Justice,
And
No medical care.

“My People”
The Marginalized,
The Discriminated,
The Unloved,
The Outcasts
Trying to make
Their way in life,
Trying to treat their pain
The best way
They knew how.

I wanted
To help
“My Own”.
“My People”
How could I not
Give back to “My” community.

The first major fundraiser
In Salt Lake City
For people with HIV
Was in 1987.
I thought it strange then
The acronym AIDS
On the poster:
“Another Individual Dies Silently”

Why was it so?

Timothy,
His love with a man
Was forbidden
In the time.
His blue eyes
Turned black
As he lay dying,
A slow death
In a hospital bed...
Alone.

Robert,
He calmed his soul
With a needle.
His blood
Colored
The bed linens,
The walls,
The floor,
Where only
The Med III nurses
Would go...
Alone.

Janis,
She sold her love,
To make a living.
Her thrush
Was so bad
That copious
Amounts of Genitian Violet
Made no difference,
Except to purple
Her teeth,
Her skin,
Her clothes,
Her hospital room
And everything near her...
Alone.

These are “My People”
The Marginalized,
The Discriminated,
The Unloved,
The Outcasts
Making their way
The best way
They knew how.

“There
But for the Grace of God
Go I.”

It was a time before
We knew what HIV was.

A time
Before
Medications
Made a difference.

A time when
Everyone died.

A time when
Fear controlled so many.

“My People” ached
For human touch,
Love,
Companionship,
In a world
Where the mainstream medical staff
Whispered
That we,
The “untainted”,
Would soon die too.

We that were there,
Wanted to be.
We fulfilled our people’s
Last wishes:
To be loved,
To be held in someone’s arms...
If only fleeting,
On their Journey.

We fought for them
In voices that were mainly unheard.

I stopped counting
Their deaths
At 500.
I couldn’t count
Any more.

I learned to cry
Without tears.

I remember
Their names,
Their stories,
Their faces.

In 1990,
The Cure
Was Promised
By the year 2000...
A fleeting goal.
Times have changed.
HIV is preventable.
It is a chronic disease
Managed by medications, viral loads and patient adherence.
HIV is no longer
A death sentence.

Times have changed.
This is my happiness.
“My People” live
A long life...
With strict rules of health.

Social justices
Are evolving.

Looking back
At my own journey...
I learned
“Everything” in the exam room,
Walking along my patients’ side
On Their journey.
Sharing...
Their intimacies,
Their secrets
Their successes.
For this I am most thankful.

I thank “my people”
For making me
Who I am today.

No one does this alone.
I joined the leader,
Dr. Kristen Ries,
In the early years.
And
One by one
Others joined too.
We became a team,
Working for a common goal.
I thank everyone
Who helped me
Help each
Individual with HIV.

My wish is that No one
Has HIV.

Listen
To “My People”
Where HIV lives
Within.

They will tell you
It’s not easy.
Medications,
Side Effects,
Sick days,
Insurance issues,
Financial costs,
Social costs,
On and on.

It is the cost of living
With HIV.

They will also
Tell you
How it has changed their lives,
For the good…
Unimaginable.
It let them see
A life from
A different window.
One that they would
Have never looked through.

My sadness is that
Some of
“My People”
Continue
To take risks
To chase,
To want,
To get
HIV.

In their worlds
Where they treat
Their pain
And continue their journeys.

Our world is so much better now.
Equality is headed our way.
We won’t go back.
“My People”
No longer have to be
Marginalized,
Discriminated,
Unloved
Or outcasts.
We have a new world.

And how do I end this?
There was no beginning
As there is no end.

It is as if I jumped
Into the white water rapids
Of an unfamiliar river;
Only now
To have come to
An eddy
That has allowed me
To retire on the shore.
I used to dance.

I was never very good. But I love falling into the music, moving this way and that, spinning and leaping, while being caught by invisible hands of rhythm and blues. I'd dance to everything, from Disney musical numbers to the hardest rocking metal songs. The world was my stage, my arena, my stripper pole. I didn't care who saw or who laughed because I danced.

When I was five, I had a bunch of those skater skirts that twirled up around my waist when I spun around and my mother was always begging me to wear white underwear with my white tights because the world could see the cartoon drawings and polka dots when I started to spin. I didn't care. In my scuffed Mary Janes and my second-hand dresses, I climbed trees and raced my bike and swirled in circles until I fell, dizzy, and the sky spun counterclockwise above me. I spun and I was different but it was okay because I danced.

Until, one day it wasn't. I only danced by myself. Where no one could see.

I remember sitting in history my junior year of high school. The gay students had taken to the halls, protesting the shutdown of even the idea of the Gay/Straight alliances. And I sat still, ashamed to join them because who I was – it wasn't included in their dance.

Two years later, walking across the campus in Austin, days before my first class would start, my eyes landed on a bright pink flier and a two-letter word that saved my life.

Bi.

Consciously, I know it wasn't the first time I'd heard it but it was the first time I remember seeing it in a positive context. The first time it had ever settled in my mind as something real. Something ... me.

My first support group meeting, I danced with the building, trying to find the open door. I found the bathroom, ducked inside, met the eyes of someone who looked as petrified as me. We didn't speak. She was sitting at the table when I scurried inside. She smiled when I took a seat.

There was the dance when I came out to my parents. When my mother - who thought I was lesbian - came out to me as bi and I remember wondering why she couldn't have just said the word to me when I was growing up. Why she couldn't have just said that whatever I was feeling, it was okay, and given me my word? Then there was my father dancing with traffic on I-15 on the way into town and how glad he was when I told him I was bi because he was so fucking worried I'd come home from college to ask for money.

I'd found family. We went to coffee shops and listened to local bands and went to clubs and danced and sat out in parked cars, talking until the sun came up again. Everyone was welcome. Swingers and doms and subs and transmen and transwomen and gender queer and cis and non-binary and we held hands and fought against Governor Bush together and we held hands while waiting on results from Lawrence v. Texas and no one was turned away.

Arms open. Everyone danced together. And sometimes it was only the women and sometimes it was only the men but we were there. For each other. And I knew that outside of my circle, outside in the world, there was judgment. There was a new dance to learn.

Bi now! Gay later!
Fence posts.

Confused.

You don't belong here.

Faker.

But then I met her. And this time, when I started spinning, it was in reverse.

I don't like that you're bi, she said. Are you sure you aren't a lesbian? You've never been with a man, she said. I can't trust you, she said. Because the ones before, they all left me for men.

I can't trust you, she said. Faker, she said.

Why can't you just be normal? she said.

I put my shoes in a drawer. I stopped twirling.

The day we cleaned out what had been her grandmother's bedroom, we boxed things for her family and closed the door, but she allowed me the skirts that had been her grandmother's and I donned them, spinning like I had when I was five. The fabric didn't fly up to my waist, and with each wearing, each spin, I found holes to mend and the need to patch unpatchable fabric. Small stitches of the finest thread still created runs. Seams weakened by dust and age split and split and split again.

When I left, I packed them. After the fights, the bruises, the lock over my heart and the seventy pounds that stopped what little dancing skill I carried, I packed them, hauling them back across country. They hung in my closet. Gathering dust. Weakening at the seams until they were cut apart to become rags that wiped away mess.

But, you know what? I still have my dancing shoes.
Gather Up the Fragments
By Sheryl D. Gillilan

Journal Entry #1
Sometimes words are so heavy that when they fall, they split time into Before and After.
“Yes, I am attracted to men,” my husband says.
I expect the wind chimes outside my bedroom window to clang discordantly and the house to shake. I brace for signs of a public emergency -- a massive power outage, the shrill warning of my smoke detectors, or sirens wailing down the hill as paramedics rush to my rescue.
Instead, our children continue to sleep peacefully and the wailing I hear is coming from me. Is this the only proof that my husband has just wielded a time cleaver and hacked off 15 years of my life?

Journal Entry #2
I am remembering a conversation I had with my son when he was seven. I walked into his bedroom and he peered down at me intently from the top bunk.
“Mom,” he said. “Are you the Tooth Fairy?”
Caught off guard, I lightheartedly replied, “Of course I’m not the Tooth Fairy! Do you see wings sprouting from my back?”
“That’s not what I mean. I want to know the truth. I want to know if you’re the Tooth Fairy.”
“You want to know the truth,” I reiterated.
“Yes,” he replied adamantly.
“You really want to know? Okay,” I said reluctantly, “I am the Tooth Fairy.” He wailed inconsolably.

Journal Entry #3
It is Valentine’s Day and the TV announcer gleefully breaks this fictitious news: “Barbie and Ken are breaking up because Ken is on his way to San Francisco with G.I. Joe.”
I have a wicked urge to steal a Ken doll and rip his head off.

Journal Entry #4
I am reading an article about quilts from the 1800’s. It references a particular quilt with letters sewn together in horizontal rows. “With some effort,” the author suggests, “you can discern that the words say, ‘Gather up the fragments, let not things be lost.’”

Journal Entry #5
I am so very, very sad. Not only am I grieving the loss of my marriage – but also what I will miss in the future.
I wanted to grow old with my husband.

Journal Entry #6
I’ve been thinking about how much fun it would be to have a fun-loving gay guy as a close friend. One who did not vow to be my soul mate in front of 200 people.

Journal Entry #7
I’m reading another article about quilting. It says that really good quilters know how to use ugly colors -- otherwise known as zingers -- to their advantage. “Zingers,” the article says, “enhance other colors and take your breath away with the strength and vibrancy they add to a quilt.”
Oh, Lordy. You have to work really, really hard to use zingers successfully, or it looks like you failed Color 101 and your quilt should be in the Last Chance Sale bin.
Journal Entry #8
I cannot hold my equilibrium. I seem to be doing okay, and then I’m paralyzed. I feel like the center of a kaleidoscope and the colors are swirling around me in a twisted, over-caffeinated sort of way.

Journal Entry #9
I cannot gather up the fragments.

Journal Entry #10
I had a fascinating dream last night (Freud would have loved it). I was looking for an elevator to get back to my hotel room with my husband and I couldn’t find the right elevator. I kept thinking, “My husband must know I’m lost by now since I have been gone for so long, but he won’t know where to find me.” And then I looked out on the street through the suddenly glass elevator and saw him walking down the street talking on his cell phone. He was walking with a man I didn’t know. I started pounding on the elevator glass to tell him where I was but he didn’t hear me.

Journal Entry #11
The kids are worried. They want to know why their father and I are sleeping in different rooms. We have offered up some plausible excuses, but they are insufficient. My daughter keeps saying to me, “Mom, I feel like there’s a question I want to ask you but I don’t know what it is.”

Journal Entry #12
We have spent the week cleaning out our bedroom, bathroom and closet so that house remodeling can proceed. It is time for me to start reconstructing my physical space in the midst of the emotional turmoil caused by my husband moving out.
I need space that is only mine, where I cannot hear betrayal reverberating in the walls. I need a womb.

Journal Entry #13
Everything is torn apart. The walls are down to their studs. There is plaster dust everywhere. My space is crowded and chaotic. My attention is pulled in myriad directions: plumber; electrician; dry-waller; tile setter. It is so much a reflection of my self that it is hard to look at and live in. On the other hand, I bought a new bed today and hung my bright, floral sheets out on the line to dry in the breeze.

Journal Entry #14
My friends came over today to help me re-paint my new space. I chose colors that pulse triumphantly in their decorator shades of August Morning, Firecracker, and Violet Eclipse. All those colors make my eyes happy.

Journal Entry #15
My divorce became final today, two years later. It is somewhat unnerving that a piece of paper can innocently arrive in the mail and legally terminate a marriage that took years to build.

Epilogue
It has been 11 years since I wailed at that yawning chasm splitting apart my life. My kids are now young adults who are smart, funny, and well-adjusted, and my former husband is married to a man. I revel in an unmarried, creative, fulfilling life – although I do hope that it will someday include a heterosexual man who is also my best friend.

I have gathered up the fragments, and marvelous gifts have been found.
The Night Jeff Died
By Brent Marrott

On June 12, 2006 at 04:02 AM, Jeff died from complications of colon cancer. Jeff and I were together for 25 years. There were three of our cats present at Jeff’s death - Buddy, Lucy, and Ginny. We had good jobs, owned a sizable house with a substantial yard, and traveled the world. Our lives were going well. The last item we expected was Jeff contracting cancer.

Jeff went into a coma at 10:00 PM that Sunday night. I thought he would make it through the night. I laid down beside him for the night. I thought back on many experiences that we had gone through in the 25 years we had been together, the last 5 1/2 years with cancer. He breathes deeply.

I am awakened at 03:00 AM. Jeff was moving. I turned on the light. He was bleeding from his nose and mouth. He was gasping for air. His eyes were closed. I reach for the liquid morphine. Rubbed it on his gums. Now convulsions. I wiped away the blood. It keeps coming. His head was jerking. He kept turning his head down and to the side. He was trying to survive.

I made the decision. I was not calling anyone. No hospice. No family. I will go through this with Jeff, no one else.

Lucy and Buddy would not stay in the room. Ginny was at the bottom on the bed for the whole time. Convulsing, jerking, blood. I was on my knees on the bed pleading for Jeff to let go. Pleading for God to take him. More morphine.

This agony has been going on for thirty minutes. Merciful God, when will it end? Pleading. Blood. Convulsing. More morphine.

No more pleading. No more bleeding. No more morphine. I hold his head erect. At 04:02 AM that Monday morning, my beloved went with the angels.

He has a slight smile. I lay with him for three hours. I put the cover over us. I rub his legs. I try to keep him warm. I put my hand on his chest. No heartbeat. No breathing. I tell him how much I love him. I just talk to him softly and calmly. I bring in the cats to say good-bye. They will not stay.

I call the mortuary. Copyright
The attendants are having trouble with the gurney in the hallway. It will not fit. We lift Jeff and slowly go
down the hallway. His arm flies out. With that gesture, I comprehend that he is dead.

The gurney is now in the entryway in the hall. He is in a black bag that is open at the top. I hold him for
the last time. I kiss him for the last time. I tell him I love him. I see his face for the last time. The black
bag is now closed.

They load the black bag into the truck. I watch from the front door window. They leave.

I go into the living room.

From chaos to silence.

I scream.
Sweetest Kiss
Anonymous

I knew my true nature before I started school. Because I was bright, I knew people’s words said one thing and their faces and gestures said something else, so I could tell that my relatives and neighbors didn’t like who I was. As a good Mormon boy, this made me hide the real me. Sometimes when I was alone, I’d bring him out. Other times, he appeared out of the blue.

When I was eleven, my Cub Scout troop was invited to go swimming with the Boy Scouts, and in the dressing room, I saw grown men naked for the first time. One man stood out more than others, and I was captivated by his completeness. From that day on, I started looking at older boys everywhere and wishing. I wished for broad shoulders, for defined pecs, for big biceps, for a fat dick, and for body hair. I wanted to be complete. I wanted to be a man.

Here is where I entered one of the most confusing stages of my life. My question was could I like girls? A few friends helped by getting girls to expose themselves to us and letting us feel them up. One time, the boy who lived across the street took me into the bedroom of his girlfriend, and while she lay on her bed naked, he told me what they did together and then they gave me a demonstration.

Perhaps the most confusing experience took place at my oldest brother’s wedding reception. I was thirteen at the time and toward the end of the reception, his wife kissed me solidly on the lips. I’d never felt such intoxicating softness and sweetness in my life. A current ran through my body. Not one that burned like electricity, but one that removed me from the world and made me soar heavenward. I wanted to kiss like that again.

Maybe that’s why I married my best friend Helen.

We met in tenth grade, but we didn’t date until after we graduated. That’s because at the time I was in love with Brooke. Brooke had doleful brown eyes, played the cello, sang and danced, and I believed that she could give me another sweetest kiss. The problem was that Brooke couldn’t love me and she couldn’t kiss me. Still I tried to win her. I tried for two years, so when I received her wedding announcement, I committed myself to Helen.

Six years later, Helen and I married. Having sex wasn’t a problem for me. Then I was young and I was horny all the time. I probably could have done it with half the women I knew and a number of household objects. The issue was that I had one curious habit and one serious gripe. In the first case, my curious habit, I fantasized about being with men. My norm was to create one of three stories, and in each I would find a man or several men to share adventure, and we would always finish up by stripping to the skin and playing rough. In the second case, my one serious gripe, I hated Helen’s touch. She gave me goose bumps, she made my skin crawl, and when her hand went for my dick I instinctively pulled away. Then with time, I hated sex. I hated to see Helen naked. I hated to touch her.

About ten years after getting married, I started asking myself this question: “Why do you dream about men? How come you fantasize about doing ‘it’ with them?” Before I could accept it, I had to say the word out loud. I had to put it into a sentence and say it with my mouth and tongue and lips:

“I am gay.”

When I had my first experience with a man, everything felt right. He was incredibly kind and sweet. I found he could touch me anywhere. No flinching, no goose bumps, and when he reached for my dick, I pushed forward for the first time in my life. I wanted to see him naked, and I wanted to feel him with my hands and body. All my made-up stories were gone. This was the fair dinkum experience I wanted and needed. Fiction was out; the real was in. I felt no guilt. None whatsoever.
My first experience was many years ago, and I’ve had others. But... Helen and I remain married. All I can say is humans are complicated; life is complicated. Yes, Helen knows I’m gay, and when we had that talk, she said, “I don’t know how not to love you.” My response was that I don’t have a crystal ball, I can’t see the future. Some day I might find someone, but maybe I never will. I told her, “For as long as it works for us, I want to stay around and help you any way I can.”

Helen and I do live apart. That is... we mostly live apart. Again, life is complicated and we are best friends. I’m at the house every day. I cut the grass and weed the garden. I make repairs and clean the house, and most times, I even cook dinner. Quite often, I spend the night.

Occasionally I do put myself out to the world and find someone to spend time with. I compare it to going on fishing trips. So far, all my trips have been catch and release. I find I’m not entirely comfortable with the gay world, so sometimes when I’m with someone I feel like I’ve been mauled, even smothered too much, and I want him off me and I want him gone... but to be congenial and polite, these are my thoughts, not my words.

I worry I’m too old to change how I live, but then, no one has ever given me another sweetest kiss.
Anatomy of an Idea
By Lu Quibelle

my Queerness is
big bellied and breasted
swinging off tall brass poles brazen pendulum hips
as the rest of her spins by the ankle
she digs elbows into queer-like-me ribs pokes her nose into other folks' business like it's her business too
but only 'cause her arms
came out bent for holding
she uses her kneecap
on the groins of the patriarchy the back of her skull
snaps the nose bridge of bigots but her umbilical cord
still stings where they
pinched it off
when they found out
her heart
has space for all kinds a curved women, her clit
stands to attention for stubble
her neck
is always stretched out
till teeth come along to leave marks dark and claiming
her toes
get stepped on a lot
she lays her head
on her best friend's shoulder she buttons her eyes
shut when she sleeps alone her nails
claw at her thighs
when she's horny
362727 she smiles bright toothy professional smiles
when she says "my girlfriend" smirks wry eyebrows
for "dating two women
no time to get laid"
her voice
is patient
when she tells small girls
they can marry each other some day
her calves
love the way her skirts swirl
her fingers
never smooth labels
unless they were custom designed
and she knows they will come off again her ear
aches from being pressed against doors wondering
if it's safe to come out
her chipped polish toes curl under the blankets her blood
runs cold under unwanted hands
her skin
has a sun and a moon and some stars because everyone's
beautiful
her heels rise up when she recites poetry her knees rise up marching capitol hill her whole torso
curves like a kitten
when good books say "love who you love."
My Queerness wears bright colors. She stands out in the crowd.
She kneels for nobody. Not anymore.
GBBS
By Dr. Christopher R. Wixom

Fag Hag, Fruit fly, Fruit loop, Flame Dame. Gay slang phrases referring to a woman who associates with and has gay men as close friends. Perhaps, but not necessarily, as the closest friend. The common stereotype is of a woman seeking a substitute for the lack of or fear of a serious heterosexual relationship.

Synonyms include Homo Honey, Goldilocks, Fairy Princess, Fairy Godmother and Queen Bee. Although I think Queen Bee has been commandeered by Beyoncé so that term may not really apply here. Wikipedia also references Cherry Fairy, Gay Boy Bunny, or GBBS (Girls who like Boys who like Boys) as alternatives that are taking hold in “some elect social groups” in San Francisco and on the East Coast. I’ve never heard those phrases, perhaps because of my personal location or age handicaps.

You know who you are... and we gay men definitely know who you are.

As with all stereotypes, the fag hag stereotype fails miserably in its attempt to categorize what is for many us one of the most important and enduring relationships in life. A relationship which often has its roots deeply embedded in the rocky soil of our journey to authenticity, self acceptance, and self love.

Could it be as simple as the removal of sex that allows this relationship between a gay man and a female friend to flourish in such a unique and satisfying way? Perhaps. Perhaps it is something more wonderfully complex that allows us to bare our selves to these women and allows them to bare themselves to us. Fully exposed we give each other and then come to rely upon complete honesty and complete acceptance.

She will march with you in that parade and share your indignation over the governmental and civil organizations that want to deny you the right to love who and what you were born to love. She will be your wing man, your beard at times. She will support you as you go through your post adolescent adolescence, but she will also tell you when you need to get your shit together or when that guy at the bar is a bad idea... and she will love you when you go home with him anyway.

You will be the person who will tell her that yes, that outfit does make her butt look fat, or that the platinum blonde die job may not have been the best choice. Because of this, she will also knows that when you tell her she is beautiful or that you love her that you are speaking truth. You will forever be the person her parents wish she had married (even after they find out you are gay). She will always be the person your parents wished you had married (especially after they find out you are gay).

You will call her when you need to cry because you know she will make you laugh. She will call on Monday morning when her cat throws up a condom after a random one-night stand, and you will never let her forget it! With any luck she will find a decent man who EVENTUALLY will come to accept and love you as part of their/your relationship. And yes, to those SMGBBs out there (Straight Men who love Girls who love Boys who love Boys) your dick size and your interest in anal play WILL be discussed. Do not be threatened, as this will most likely work to your advantage.

When she finds a lump in her breast you will be there for her while she waits for an agonizing week to find out it is benign. And then you will take her out for martinis and sushi or whatever the fuck else she wants to do to celebrate. You will celebrate her children and love them as your own. Or you will support her choice to not have children. She will embrace every man you fall in love with even if she thinks they are not good enough for you (because, of course, none of them really are). And although she may not
fully understand why you were afraid or ashamed, she will forgive you for waiting so long to tell her that you are HIV positive.

Fag hag? For me, a diminutive label for a relationship that, despite time and distance, spans all of the intersections of our lives. We may be the Will to their Grace, but they without doubt bring an invaluable grace to our will.
Dear Mormonism

By Stephanie Lauritizen

How are you? It’s been awhile. The internet tells me you are doing well, building new temples, writing fancy amicus briefs, and trying to figure out what to do with your women. (Hint: try Priesthood.) Anyway, I know you are very busy, but I wanted to tell you thank you. Thank you for raising me into this inactive misfit Mormon woman. Thank you for making me a feminist and an LGBT ally. Thank you for giving me the tools to raise an independent and kind daughter, thank you for giving me the eyes in which I see the world. I would be ungrateful not to recognize your role in who I am as a woman, a parent, and a spouse. Thank you.

When you taught me to believe I am a child of God, filled with divine nature and individual worth, I believed you. I believed in my divinity enough that when I grew up, the confines of man-made patriarchy and traditional gender roles paled in comparison with what I knew. A child of God doesn’t need to hearken unto her husband, or simply nurture while her husband provides. A child of God sees her worth not just in her uterus, but in her mind. A child of God uses that mind to read The Feminine Mystique, a child of God understands internalized misogyny, and a child of God knows that short skirts don’t rape people, or that the women wearing them are not like “walking pornography.”

More importantly, you taught me to love one another, another song so familiar I could never forget this new commandment, even when my days of singing in Sacrament Meeting were over. So I loved. I loved my way through 2008 and Prop. 8, and your stubborn devotion to “The Proclamation to the Family.” I loved even when my fellow church members told me that “when the Prophet speaks, the thinking has been done.” Even when I lost friends, even when I lost my faith in this church, in you, Mormonism, I never stopped loving. Because you taught me that “whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it,” and when I lost my life as an active Mormon, I found myself as an ally, activist, and a friend. And when more people find themselves, we save not just ourselves, but the “least of these,” the LGBT children who may have otherwise been lost to suicide and hate crimes and dehumanizing legislation rooted in fear.

Thank you, Mormonism, for teaching me about my pioneer ancestors, who faced an undue amount of persecution for believing differently than their neighbors and friends. Those guilt-inducing lessons on genealogy taught me that I have defiance and strength written into my DNA, because if my ancestors could leave their homes to chase a promised land, I can leave my home, your home Mormonism, in search of a more egalitarian and loving Zion.

Mormonism, I’ve spent my life listening to that still, small voice, hoping that I will be brave enough to listen to the promptings of the spirit, and to follow what it teaches me. I continue to listen, because you taught me that listening to that voice inside me will protect me from evil, especially that tricky sort of meanness that “calls evil good and good evil.” I listen and I know that benevolent sexism, the type that would put me on a pedestal and tell me I’m too pure to get my hands dirty with power is wrong. I listen, and I know the cruelest evil is that which calls bigotry “religious liberty” and hurts others in the name of God. And when I begin to doubt my faith, when the siren call of the community I lost rings, and the comfort of fitting in seems inviting, and when I long for the approval of my peers, I do what President Uchtdorf tells me, and I “doubt my doubts,” and then I “stop it.” I am a child of God, who loves one another, and listens to the spirit.

Remember when you taught me about the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, the heroes of The Book of Mormon who made a promise with God never to go to war again, and then buried their weapons? They preferred death over a broken promise, and they taught me about the value of sacrifice. I remember them because I too have buried my weapons; I buried my homophobia, my own self-taught brand of sexism,
and my fear. I buried them and I will not raise them again, even if it means I stand outside the doors of the temple the day my sister gets married.

I expect you see me as a monster, a Frankenmormon, an unholy amalgamation of beliefs that contradict the perfect Mormon woman you envisioned. But I see a Daniel, who spent her upbringing in the Lion’s Den of orthodox Mormonism and came out stronger. You raised me to see miracles everywhere, Mormonism, and I do. I see miracles when a white Texan sports announcer decries the homophobia of the NFL. I see miracles when a teenage girl fights against the Taliban for her right to an education. I see miracles when Mormons march in Pride Parades, and women ask for a seat in the Priesthood session. I see miracles, and I believe in a world that will be saved once more by a Messiah of equality and fairness and love. This is the world I raise my child in, and I see it with wonder and faith. So thank you, Mormonism, from the bottom of my left-wing bleeding heart. Thank you.
King of the Castle
By Melissa Rasmussen

Dad
All knowing, all powerful, ordained by God
You were the one who taught me to hate
Hate them! (you ordered via your “unofficial” drivel) Nonmembers, Jack Mormons
Adulterers and fornicators
Hollywood democrats and hippies
Why can’t black people go to the temple?
Aren’t we all children of God?
Why are feminists bad?
YOU think men and women are equal don’t you?
Hate militant feminists! (you amended) The bra burners
Women who talked too much, who spoke up for themselves Donahue, and his wife Marlo Thomas (who
said everyone was ok) Hate them the most! (you decreed)
The men who kiss men, women who caress women
Hate them! Despise them! Be disgusted by them! (you taught)
Those native men in Africa had sex with monkeys, and then each other
So God cursed them! He gave them AIDS to purge the earth of their depravity
The news said that a little boy named Ryan White had AIDS
They wouldn’t let him go to school...Was that because he had sex with a monkey? All those people on
TV were so sick, and no one knew how to cure them
Hate them! (you tutored)
I was confused
Aren’t we supposed to help the sick? Doesn’t Jesus love them?
Hate them! (you cried)
The wicked world glorifies their corrupt, immoral ways
Their twisted, revolting, repulsive behavior!!!
It seems you only talk about
Sex, sex, sex bad, bad, bad
Hate them! (you commanded)
People we don’t even know... Who don’t tell us what to do with our lives... Why are you always so
obsessed by what other people are doing anyway? Who other people are in love with?
Hate them! Hate them! Hate them! (you bellow, day in and day out) These men who caress men,
women who kiss women
It’s unnatural! (you insist)
And insist, and insist
And then one day I have a thought
A calm... crystalline... rebellious inkling
You see, I can’t help but notice we all have lips
Any two lips on the planet can press to any other two lips on the planet
That’s how a kiss works... So exactly who’s to say one kiss is unnatural and another fine?
Hate them! (you shout)
YOU with your dogged oppression of anyone different
And your wrath... A blind fury towards women who love women, men who love men, I’m beginning to
wonder why you obsess so much about this... What are you afraid of?
I know what I’m afraid of...
So from now on, every word you utter is suspect
You are not all knowing, all powerful
You aren’t even kind
You will teach me no more life lessons
I decide what to do, what to think, what to be
I will no longer lean into your hate
I choose love.
Nothing but Meat
by Kelly Albrecht

I was honest from the very start
No, no, no
But my friend was a hunter, and pursued his prey. Yes, yes, yes
Subtle advances became unwanted touches. Stop, please, stop
Fed up and trapped, I closed doors to cower behind. Tap, tap, tap
I stayed my ground, but fearful of who wanted in. Knock, knock, knock
Fists at the door, the hunter insisted on having his way. Pound, pound, pound
With persistent urge the hunter pushed for control. Crash, Crash, Crash
The door did crack and I began to whimper
Break, break, break
The door shattered, the hunter entered, I was finally broken. Nowhere to run, years of the hunt turned silent and numb
Cornered and tired I gave up my soul
My clothes were removed and my legs pushed up
The hunter pushed in with lust in his eyes and fucked his prey who was already dead. Score, score, score
Victorious and proud the hunter proclaimed, Best. Sex. Ever.
Defeated and worn I hung my head, to cry, cry, cry
But the tears never came, and still I question, Why, why, why
Living the Life
By Claire Melton

My dads. Microsoft Word doesn’t accept that the singular pronoun “my” can be connected to the plural pronoun “dad” without any qualifying statements. Neither can most people. A person will ask about my dad, not feeling the need to distinguish which father they’re referring to. After all, most children only have one. This can lead to misunderstandings, and get very confusing, as you might imagine, and I almost always have to follow up any question about my dads with, “Which one?”

We went to Iowa for the wedding. The church was a classic whitewashed wooden building, with a bell tower in the middle, and a manicured lawn. Nothing special, but still beautiful. There were nine of us in the room: Me, my brother, three relatives and one friend as witnesses, and my dad and soon-to-be stepfather, who were wearing almost-but-not-quite matching ties. The female pastor was wearing white robes with a rainbow stole. All of us, with the exception of the pastor, were dressed in a way that almost seemed overly formal, were it not for the feeling of importance that my father and his partner were displaying. I can count the times I’ve seen my dad cry on one hand, and this occasion is the most prominent in my memory. Seeing him cry triggered my own tears, and I held the bouquet closer to my face to hide my suddenly runny nose. Later that night at the reception, my new stepdad taught me how to properly eat escargot, and later the next day, my dads went to the courthouse to get an official Iowa marriage certificate. In a wonderful twist of irony, their license was signed by the Honorable Joseph Smith.

One day, a few months after the wedding, we were driving in the car with the oldies station playing sixties and seventies hits. My stepdad suddenly broke the silence to ask me if it was okay to introduce me as his daughter. He asked as though requesting that someone pass the salt, with the radio still playing at full volume. My heart soared as I replied, in the same tone, “Yeah, sure, if you want to.”

Living with my dads’ Lifestyle can be exhausting. To an extent, I was privy to the Lifestyle long before my dad came out. He’s always loved Broadway musicals, and I’d memorized the Mama Mia soundtrack by the time I was eight. In spite of that, being the daughter of two gay men was akin to culture shock. My whole life had been pretty quiet up until that point, and I doubt I could have coped if I hadn’t had the possibility of escaping to the relative sanity of my mother’s house every once in a while. I’d never experienced huge parties or crowded rooms filled with strangers, so I was thoroughly unprepared for the changes that came with gay dads. I was thrown into a world of hostesses, wine, and polite conversation with people whose names I couldn’t remember no matter how hard I tried. I had to develop a whole new vocabulary, but I am proud to say that I now know the name of any item of silverware, from mustache spoons to individual asparagus tongs (of which we have twelve).

The Lifestyle would never be complete without the Dinner Party. My favorites, the traditional version, are usually only brought to my attention when I wake up to a flurry of cooking, cleaning, wine selection, and occasional redecorating. The table is set with silver, linens, glassware and china. All of these must complement each other as well as the season, and are laid out just so. Floral arrangements are in crystal, silver, or Roseville vases, with two or four candelabras or candlesticks complementing the vision. The layout of our table rivals a Royal Family’s holiday spread, or at least warrants a page in Architectural Digest.

When guests arrive, I play hostess, accepting whatever food or wine they have brought and answering routine questions about the progress of my education and any romantic relationships. Cocktails and wine are served to tide us over until dinner. My stepdad prepares the salads individually—greens, toppings, and dressing artfully arranged on chilled plates. The bread is then served in a wooden bowl alongside the salad. The main course usually includes a roast, some kind of vegetable, and a potato dish.
The food must be passed counterclockwise. There is rarely dessert, unless provided by a guest. Leftovers are used for lunches the next week, after which the cycle begins again.

Remember, the Gay Lifestyle is a serious condition and must be dealt with appropriately. In addition to Dinner Parties, symptoms may include:

An excessive quantity of antiques and art

A pressing need to critique the fashion choices of the popular media and, a sexual attraction to people of the same gender.

If you do find yourself with these symptoms, recognize that you might as well go with it, because repressing it is just plain boring and will eventually lead to serious complications if you are in a heterosexual relationship.

Find support among your friends, family and community groups. A standard combination consists of three or more same sex couples, the obligatory Sassy Gay Friend, and multiple straight friends. Experts suggest that one of these people own a pickup truck for those times when you just have to bring home that fabulous Early American oak china cabinet.

Track your progress in public and among your supporters. You will know you’ve started to Embrace the Gay when you say “gaily forward” instead of “straight,” and you’ve signed on to email lists for antique shows and estate sales. Track your progress by adopting a few little old ladies and take food to them every other week or so.

Take responsibility for your Lifestyle. Wine will be spilled on antique tablecloths. You will run out of wall space, even if you double-hang. Your liquor budget will expand dramatically.

You must make amends to those you have hurt along the way to embracing the Gay Lifestyle. This is important. Be very certain that when you tell someone their clothes are tacky, they know you have their best interests at heart, and that it hurts you when you see them wearing such an unfortunate combination of heels and cargo pants.

And finally, when embracing your Lifestyle, you must be aware of common side effects:

Full social schedules

Money loss due to ballet, symphony and theater tickets

A following of doting elderly women, and

Being constantly asked fashion advice from your daughter.

In the end, though, you must face that this is your life. Remember, the Gay Lifestyle can be exhausting, but you are only as flamboyant or stereotypical as you want to be.
Feathers
By Richard Clegg

Until this evening your signs were lean,
And for a time far between
When once legion, loving
Keenly felt and seen

One day you startled me, I swear,
With your presence in a feather
White and unexpected on a stair
In our Spanish casa where
We used to share our summers
With that sign you said
"Well done, hang in there"

For a long while you would often whisper
Encouragement in my ear
Would send the owls to hoot from afar
Or to roost in my tree quite near
And with their night calls,
Speak to me of your endless love
Your understanding of my loneliness
Awareness of my grief and despair
As I heard them in the dark or stared
Into their daytime eyes
I was comforted a sign
Like the feather

That was when I was filled with fear
Could barely cope without you near
Hour to hour
Day by day
Year by year

While still here yet knowing you'd be there
You once promised
Your presence in a breeze caressing my forehead
Then you were dead

There was nothing left but your signs
A feather, owls, a breeze
Your face in the full moon

Then for a while I was naughty and loose
With silly cigarettes and booze
My punishment? To lose
Your presence, the signs and
With your absence silence
Itself a sign perhaps that I should find
Myself groping, stumbling
Bereft of help of any kind
Left to feel my own way Home
Alone

Until this Winter's evening as I tread
The Marktplatz and all was dead where
Upon the moist cobblestones you spread

FEATHERS

Feathers Everywhere it seemed

As if a white winged angel had
Fought to death for me my Demons
Saying, "Fear not"

You had given me one last stunning sign
That all is fine
That it is time

This moment
This life
Is no longer ours but

Mine