

# Leader Resource 11

## WORKSHOP THIRTEEN

### STORIES OF GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL ADOLESCENTS

KYLE DALE BYNION, 18  
*Baltimore, Maryland*

All my life I've known I was different. But if someone were to ask me how I feel different, I wouldn't be able to answer them. The best way to explain it would be to say that being attracted to the same sex is as natural to me as being attracted to the opposite sex is for heterosexuals.

I have probably known I was gay since I was twelve. I don't think I knew that there was such a thing as "gay" until then. I used to go down in the cellar with other boys. We'd touch and kiss each other. I know it's natural for children to "experiment" with the same sex, but I knew, even then, that that was what I wanted. When I finally figured out what I was, I honestly don't remember feeling any different. I guess being gay just felt natural to me. Of course, I didn't realize back then how hard and frustrating it was going to be.

I have a twin brother, Chad, who is also gay. I figured out Chad was gay at about the same time I figured myself out. I don't remember how I knew. I just knew. When I was seventeen, I came out to my brother and his lover. We were all away on vacation. They were in bed, and I just came in and blurted it all out. I'd known about them for a long time, but they had no clue that I was gay. I'd been very active sexually since I was twelve, and I had lots of stories to tell them. I felt great. And, of course, nothing changed between us.

Then my parents found out about Chad. My mother found a letter from his lover in his drawer. They were devastated. My mother wondered what she'd done wrong. She was afraid my little sister would be a lesbian. My stepfather immediately suspected that I was gay too. At the time, I wasn't ready to admit it to them, so I adamantly denied it. But my stepfather wouldn't stop harassing me. Finally, I just yelled, "Shut up! I'm gay. You're right!" Finally. It was off my chest and I felt good.

But two weeks later, I found out my mom thought I was kidding. She hadn't thought I meant it. When I saw the hope in her eyes, I couldn't tell her that I'd been serious. She'd be crushed. I decided I'd tell her after she accepted my brother.

In the meantime, I made a mistake. I told someone I thought I could trust about me and Chad. It turned out he wasn't really a friend. He told everyone. All of our friends at work found out. Chad felt a lot of resentment toward me.

Then my mom found out about me. Apparently, she went through my drawers and found some gay literature. She confronted me, and I told her the truth. I thought it would feel great to have this burden off my shoulders, but it didn't. It did feel good that I didn't have to hide anymore. But her heart was broken. She blamed herself, my father, me. I tried to convince her that it's no one's fault. But she was too wrapped up in her religion to listen to me. She thought her prayers could make me straight.

I was a wreck. I began considering suicide. Just the thought of me tormenting her for the rest of her life tore me up inside. I didn't know if I was strong enough to handle it. I never wanted to hurt her.

I have often been asked (or overheard others being asked, about themselves) if I would go "straight" if I could. Though I have never honestly answered the question, I'd like to now. If I could change my sexuality, I would. I know I'll probably offend a lot of people by saying that, but let me explain. My family has literally been uprooted by this. I know that my brother and I, and our friends, and everyone else has a right to be gay and enjoy anything that a heterosexual would. It shouldn't matter whom we go to bed with, but it does. That is why I would change my sexuality if I could—because I don't like hurting people I love. But I can't. And I'm not going to suppress my wants and desires just to please some narrow-minded people.

Thank you for giving me and others an opportunity to express ourselves. In this world where gays are so oppressed, it's good to be able to have a voice.

*Source: Ann Heron, ed., Two Teenagers in Twenty (Boston: Alyson Press, 1995).*

RACHEL CORBETT, 16

*Madison, Wisconsin*

Throughout and since childhood, I've been a "tomboy." In my second-grade picture, I was wearing a plaid shirt with rainbow suspenders and jeans. I hated dresses and nylons. I thought they were uncomfortable and never understood why I should have to wear uncomfortable clothes. My hair has almost always been cut short. Once, I tried to grow it out, only to get sick of it and chop it off. To this day, I've had more male friends than female friends. As a child, I chose the He-Man figurine or Matchbox cars over the Strawberry Shortcake doll or Barbie. I was always outside on my dirt bike skinning my knees instead of inside playing house.

My mother had a couple of gay and lesbian friends when I was growing up. That's the first place I learned about being gay or lesbian. When I was young, I don't think I saw any difference between heterosexual and homosexual relationships. I was young and was brought up to believe love is love, whether it involves people of the opposite sex or people of the same sex. It wasn't until I started Catholic school in the sixth grade that I became aware of homophobia. Kids would always make comments about effeminate men and say that all the nuns at the school were lesbians. It was at that school where I learned that there is a great deal of opposition to homosexuality.

That same year, some new people moved into the neighborhood. After they had settled in, I went over to see if they had any children I could be friends with. Luckily for me, they had two boys. They were a little younger than me, but I wasn't about to be fussy. (Most of the other kids in my neighborhood were either infants or in high school.) The boys in the house were being raised by two women. As time went on, I realized that they were probably lesbians. The two women never told me that they were gay, and neither did their sons. When they moved in, the boys were about seven and eight, and I'm not sure if they knew about their moms. I can understand why the women wouldn't tell me. I was eleven at the time, and they probably weren't sure what my parents would think. I'm pretty sure they were gay, though: they shared a bedroom, and one time I heard them talking about the bills together. The boys' dads

were the only men I ever saw around the place. (And recently, I saw the two women at a documentary about lesbians; I guess that pretty much confirms it!)

The two women and their children made me aware of a new type of lifestyle that I really hadn't known existed. I began to realize that I wanted to live a life like theirs . . . not like the one my parents lived. Before they moved in, I could never picture myself being a housewife while my husband went out and earned the money for our family. I realized that I could relate more to them than to my parents. Over the years, I have lost touch with them, and I regret that. But they are still very important role models in my life. They made me aware of my sexual orientation, and I thank them.

Last October, I was downtown walking around with a friend. We saw all these people marching down State Street chanting. One chant went like this: "Two, four, six, eight, how do you know your mother's straight?" I asked my friend what was going on. She told me it was a gay pride march. We watched for a while, and I was so happy to see gays, lesbians, and bisexuals unafraid to show their affection for one another. They were standing up for their rights and demanding more. That night I returned home feeling very proud and decided that it was time for me to come out to my mother.

I was scared about what my mother would say. I was worried that she wouldn't accept me. I knew she supported homosexual rights, because whenever hatemongers were on the talk shows saying that homosexuals should be killed, my mother stood up for the homosexuals. She even yelled obscenities at the TV screen! But even though I knew she was for homosexual rights, I wasn't sure how she'd feel about her daughter being a lesbian. She had always talked about me having a big marriage ceremony in a Catholic church, and a huge reception with a big cake. I didn't want to disappoint her; I wanted to live up to all the expectations I thought she had of me. After thinking about it, I realized that it wouldn't be fair for me to hide my sexual orientation from her. After all, she was my best friend and she would be able to accept it. She had always been there for me no matter what, and I hoped she still would be after I told her.

That night, I was feeling bold, so I started on my way up the stairs to her bedroom. I went in and sat on her bed like I've done many times before when I had something to talk about. She sat up and asked, "What's up, kiddo?" I sat in the dark silence. I tried to speak, but instead I began to cry.

"Rachel, what's the matter? I can't help you unless you tell me what's wrong."

I looked her in the eyes, wishing she could read my mind. It would be so much simpler that way. No chance of that happening. I began to cry harder and wanted to back down. But there was no way I could just tell her that I'd had a nightmare. I had to tell her the truth; I had to get it over with.

"Mom?"

"Yes, Rachel. Go ahead. You can tell me anything."

"Mom." Tears rolled down my face. "Mom, I'm . . ."

"Go ahead, honey, it's okay."

"Mom. . . ." I took a deep breath and decided this was it. "I'm a . . . a . . . a . . . lesbian." I cried again.

"Go ahead, honey. Tell me the rest. You can trust me."

"Mom, that's it. I'm a lesbian."

"So why are you so upset?"

"I thought you would be upset, because I'm never going to have a husband and a big wedding."

Mom began to chuckle as she surrounded me with a hug. "I'm so proud of you." A tear rolled down her cheek. "You're my daughter and I love you. I will always love you, no matter what you are. I will always support you in everything that you do. As long as you're happy, I'm happy. You sure are silly, though," she said to me with a smile on her face.

I smiled and began to cry again, because I was filled with so much joy. We talked for a long time. She asked me if I minded if anyone else in our house knew. I told her it would be okay with me, and within three days my father, grandmother, and brother knew. They all took it very well. They are proud of me.

In the weeks that followed, my mother and I talked more than ever before. She was and still is extremely supportive of me. I thank her so much. If she didn't accept me, I don't know if I'd still be around.

Now, at the age of sixteen—one year after coming out to my mother, and many books and movies later—I have learned a lot more about myself. If I had a choice, I wouldn't change my sexual orientation. I am angry, because I find it hard to meet other gays my age. But in a year and a half, I will be in college and there will be more people to meet.

Inside, I'm proud of what I am, but I'm not out to the general public. I believe that coming out is an ongoing process. Since I've told my mother, I've also told a few close friends. I have begun to speak up for homosexual rights in my private Catholic school and soon will deal with gay issues in my photography. I've also spoken to groups about what it's like to be a gay teenager. In college I'm hoping I'll be able to step further and further out of the closet, because I'll be in a more diverse group of people. And, hopefully, they will be more accepting than the five hundred students at my school.

So far, my coming-out experiences have been very positive. Again, I would like to express my thanks to the two women on the corner raising their sons, and to my best friend, who happens to be my mother. I admire you all.

Source: Ann Heron, ed., *Two Teenagers in Twenty* (Boston: Alyson Press, 1995).

LIZ

The first inklings of my sexuality came when I was at secondary school. I was very close to a girl there and I knew it was more than just a friendship. Although I didn't verbalize it to anybody, not even to her, I was sure that there was more there than society accepted. But even from that early point it didn't worry me; I knew it wasn't going to be a problem as I was happy to be in the mainline heterosexual mold for most of the time.

Just before I went to college, I stayed with a friend whom I'd known for quite a few years—we'd met every so often in the course of group meetings. She was very responsive to my friendship and I realized that this could be a physical thing, not just an emotional attachment. Although it was very brief, I realized this was a new direction that was open to me, and that was lovely.

By the time I got to college, and met my boyfriend, D, I was beginning to wonder how being a bisexual would fit into my life. For example, how would a male partner react to it? I also didn't know how I would find female lovers, apart from the friend I'd been to stay with. She was living in London, so I didn't see her very often, and as she was involved in a heterosexual relationship as well, it was difficult to fit in more than the odd cuddle.

Source: Sue George, *Women and Bisexuality* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993), pp. 152–153.