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Feature Article

My Wonderful Life: A Coming out Story by Daniel *

Passover had just ended and I was out with my best friend, Morgan, to stuff pasta down our throats. We've been best friends our whole lives, except for the first five years, when her big brother convinced her that I was really a duck and so she avoided me until she turned six and realized that he was wrong. Morgan and I are the sort of best friends who hang out all the time and never get sick of each other. I mean, we could both be in my small apartment doing totally different things and I don't feel like my privacy or my personal space is being invaded. She was my date for my brother's wedding. She's Jewish too. And beautiful. When people look at us they think that we've been dating for years. Pardon the overused expression, but if I had a nickel for every time someone at my brother's wedding asked when our wedding would be, I would be a very rich man. Honestly, I wish I could marry her and give her children. It breaks my heart to see her going on dates with clowns who don't deserve her, but, the truth is, I'm gay.

I've always been gay. This isn't one of those stories about the high school sweethearts who tragically break up when the boy comes out. I never really came out to myself. I always knew. Morgan always knew too, but she still made me say it out loud to her. Maybe she was in denial and needed to hear it or maybe she wanted me to see clearly who I was, since I had yet to act upon my desires. I think it was a little of both. We grew up on Long Island in a very straight neighborhood and we both now go live and spend a lot of time in the very gay, theatre district. Looking back, if you had to pick which one of my parents' sons would grow up to be gay it would definitely have been me. My brother's walls, and ceiling, were covered with sports posters and half-naked girls. I had no interest in either. My walls had posters of Broadway shows and Barbra Streisand album covers. In many ways I'm a stereotypically gay male. This is not to say that gay men don't necessarily like sports or half-naked girls. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that aside from my love of the theatre and my disinterest in sports, I don't fall into the other stereotypes. I'm not flaming, I don't have a limp wrist and, to Morgan's great disappointment, I hate shopping. My point is that I couldn't imagine my parents being entirely shocked when I would eventually come out to them.

I never kept being gay a secret from my parents because I thought they would disown me. I've heard about such cases and I feel very bad for those people who were brave enough to tell their intolerant parents. I didn't want them to know because I didn't want to see the disappointment on their faces. I love my parents. I've never been super close with either of them, but we get along well and I know that they love me, too. For awhile, I thought that I would come out to my parents when I had

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someone special for them to meet. In the meantime, they'd probably just continue to suspect that Morgan and I had something going on. My mother asked me at the Seder, "Why don't you and Morgan just be a couple already?"

"Because we're young and we want to experience other people before we settle down." That seemed to satisfy her. That's what Morgan told her parents when they'd ask about me.

So, Passover was over and Morgan and I were stuffing our greatly missed pasta down our throats and I thought about how lucky I am. I have a family who loves me, a best friend who loves me, and I'm working in the theatre, pursuing my dream. I'm happy with who I am and the life I'm living. And I wanted my parents to be a part of that. "Morgan?" She looked up, spaghetti streaming out of her mouth. I guess Italians are much better at eating this kind of food. "I think I'm going to tell my parents I'm gay." She stayed calm and didn't make a big deal out of what I said, which I was grateful for.

"When?"

"In two weeks, after I turn twenty one. Because then I'll be an adult." She looked at me like I had four heads.

"You're an adult when you're thirteen or eighteen. Regardless, that's a ridiculous excuse. I'm not going to deal with you being a nervous wreck for the next two weeks. Do it tomorrow when they come over for brunch."

She's a riot. But, she's right. If I waited, I would've been a nervous wreck. The next day, they came over and I came out. We returned from brunch and I was about to run out to the drug store and I realized that there wasn't going to be a perfect time to do it. I turned around. "Mom, Dad could you sit on the couch for a minute?" My voice was surprisingly calm. I felt like I was in the first grade and the principal yelled at our class and all I wanted to do was burst out laughing.

They walked over to the couch talking to themselves, "The couch? Why the couch? What's he going to tell us?" I looked at them sitting there, knowing that I would never be sitting on a couch with my wife looking at my son. I felt very small, like I was six years old again. For a moment I wished that I was. Life was so simple then. You didn't have to be gay or straight. Then I realized, you know what? I'm happy. I'm happy being gay. It's not my first pick, but I'd also rather be tall and muscular instead of short and skinny. We are who we are and we can either resent it or choose to love it and embrace it.

"Mom, Dad, you might have figured it out already, but I want you to know, I'm gay."

I didn't know what to expect, but surprisingly I felt calm and in control, like a weight had been lifted. They were very supportive. They both admitted that they had thought that I was, but never discussed it, not even with each other. My father felt guilty. He asked if he had done anything in my childhood to contribute to this. I told him, absolutely not. I told him that he introduced me to sports and I hated it and he introduced me to the theatre and I loved it, but that's not why I'm gay. I hate shopping. They said that they weren't in shock, but they needed time to get used to it. I told them to feel free to talk to me about it anytime.

My mother called me late that night. "So, do you have somebody special for me to meet." I think that in a way she was excited to have a gay son. Having a straight and married older brother definitely took some of the stress away.

"No, not yet. But, I'm looking."

"I don't think it's so bad that you're gay. I was afraid that when you sat me and Daddy down that you were going to tell us that you were dating a goy."

Oy vey, somethings never change. Coming out to my parents really was not a life altering experiences. I'm very lucky and very thankful that they were as supportive as they were and continue to be. Of course, they'd rather have two straight sons. For a while I wanted to be straight too. But, as time goes by, I realize that being gay (as compared to being straight) is not second best. It's just different. And like I said before, we can choose to love the difference and embrace it. My life is defined by who I am. I have a wonderful life, not because I'm gay, but because I'm me.

*** Names have been changed to protect anonymity.**

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