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Coming out of the closet

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Editorial



Coming out of the closet

I grew up in a small town in Maine, right outside of Bangor. Like most towns in Maine, it was very homophobic. My experience of being gay is defined by that and one other thing, the murder of Charlie Howard.

Charlie Howard was an innocent man who was killed in cold blood by teenagers from Bangor just because he was gay; thrown off a bridge into shallow water even though he was screaming that he could not swim.

These two things together told me from the time I started exploring my sexuality that I was something flawed, that I was dangerous to me. Needless to say I kept to myself and never, ever opened up to anybody.

When it came time for me to come to college, I was excited; finally I was going to be at a place where I could be accepted for who I was.

I chose the wrong university.

Luckily for me I didn't come out and say I was gay. I had learned my lessons; I waited to see what was going on. I soon learned that the people in my dorm were just as homophobic as the people in my hometown.

How could they not be? They were from a thousand towns just like it. I felt like I was doomed; I knew that somewhere out there people were open about being gay, but I felt like I could never get there myself.

My second year here, things were different in several ways. I came back from the summer feeling very good about myself, a first. I also had built a very strong group

Jeremiah Genest

Guest columnist

of friends who I felt could accept me for who I am, and not what they thought I was.

I felt like I was ready, I just needed the proper nudge in the right direction. The nudge came a few weeks after school started in the form of National Coming Out Day.

Here were brave women and men who were standing up in public and saying "This is who I am, this is my sexuality, accept it because we are not going to hide." It shocked me, I was amazed, and finally it gave me a direction to go.

The next week, I went to a Wilde-Stein meeting; it gave me strength to see so many good people there. I was in tears. Here was a place I truly felt like I belonged with no questions asked. That night I came out to my roommate. I'm lucky he's an understanding and cool guy. He accepted my sexual orientation with no problems, and he's been a great person to lean on when times are bad.

During the next couple of weeks, I came out to all my good friends. Then I came out to my parents, and even that wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. No ranting or raving, just shock. Now I can safely say that anyone who knows me well knows I'm gay.

It hasn't been all that easy. Some

of my teachers don't look me in the eye anymore. I feel very uncomfortable around people in my major, forestry; many of them are very heterosexist. I hear random comments about "fags" and "queers" when people don't think I'm around. I know I get the stares. People who used to be my friends avoid me — "no time now," they get away from me as quickly as possible; they're probably afraid I'll contaminate them.

Most television sickens me, the little comments and innuendoes about gays, the stereotypical characters.

What seems to be the favorite show on campus, *Saturday Night Live*, is blatantly homophobic. I can't watch it, makes me sick.

People think I'm overreacting when I say these things to them. A lot of popular music also says a lot of derogatory things towards gays and lesbians. In fact, I'm bombarded from all directions by heterosexist messages.

Like I said, I'm out to just about everyone, but still for me this is a big step. I'm moving from being out on the personal level to being out on the public. Now people, when they meet me, will know that I'm gay.

Perhaps that will be the only thing on their mind and they won't get to know me. All I can say is that it will be their loss. I've learned my lesson; no longer will I hide in a closet.

We're Queer
We're Here
Get used to it!

— from "The Queer National Anthem"