

Until Now

Until now, I chose to share a personal struggle that I had gone through in my past with just a handful of people. It was easier to portray myself as having an easy, normal life, without too many major bumps along the way. As I share my story here, my prayer is that it may bring hope to those who share a similar struggle.



What was so different about my childhood and young adult years? Nothing was different on the outside. I was raised in a solid, loving, Christian home. My father was a pastor and my mother was the music director at the same church. After attending a Lutheran elementary school, I continued on to a Lutheran high school, and then a Lutheran college. My life as a teenager was nicely sheltered from real world temptations such as alcohol, drugs, or premarital sex. And at the same time my spiritual development was strengthened through the influence of my Christian teachers, friends, and high school youth group. Life after college brought me to a Lutheran elementary school to start teaching and sharing my faith with children.

However, on the inside, I questioned my sexual identity and became convinced that I was a homosexual. How did I come to think of myself that way? First, I was a typical tomboy. From a very young age, I loved being physically active outside with the neighbor kids, playing baseball in the empty lot behind our house, and climbing trees with the boys. My mom tells me I begged her to let me take my bat and ball to school on the first day of kindergarten. While I had long hair until age 5, I chose to have short hair throughout the rest of my childhood. Though there's nothing wrong with girls having short hair, I sometimes thought I looked like a boy. Friends would poke fun at me in school by calling me a boy, and occasionally I was mistaken for a boy in public places. There were times I didn't feel I was meant to be a girl and wondered why God didn't make me a boy. I perceived myself as having more masculine qualities than feminine ones.

My tomboyish tendencies continued into my high school years too. I never wanted to wear make-up and was not favorable to feminine clothing, such as dresses or lacy clothes. It didn't help that most of my friends entered puberty much earlier than I did. A feeling of relief followed the beginning of menstruation for me, because it was sure proof that I was fully female and had that in common with the rest of my friends. I loved participating in sports, and so, to a great extent, my friendships were formed with sports-minded females. Dating guys during high school was not something my friends and I ever talked about. Schoolwork, having fun with each other, and being involved with seasonal sports were our priorities.

Another sign that made me think of myself as a homosexual was that I was attracted to other females. When I was younger, these special feelings for other females did not bother me because I didn't even know what homosexuality was. I didn't feel there was anything wrong with me. Other girls may have had those feelings, too, and just never told anyone, I thought.

As I grew older, especially during high school, I began wondering why I didn't have the same feelings for males as I did for females. That's when I began to understand the "homosexual" term and started labeling myself that way. My hope to have similar feelings for males began to grow stronger, so I could prove to myself that I wasn't who I thought I was. However, there were no males for whom I had similar attractions. I could tell my friends which guy I thought was cute or handsome, but I never had a "crush" on a guy, which is what it seemed I had on certain girls.

My teaching years brought me new experiences in dating males that seemed to confirm my notions about my sexual identity. For each male relationship, a pattern developed. I was comfortable with them as friends and enjoyed getting to know them. But when they wanted to move the relationship beyond friendship, the label I gave myself plus the lack of physical attraction on my part would get in the way. The relationships would either end or go back to casual friendships when I told them that I didn't share the same feelings they had for me. Since they didn't know my secret, I felt as if I was leading them on and hurting their feelings in the process.

But one reason I continued to date males was that I hoped and prayed that my feelings for them would change and that maybe the right man was still coming along. Indeed, my dream in life was to be married someday (to a man!) and to have a family.

I had never shared my abnormal thoughts and feelings with anyone, except God, until age 23. I hid my feelings intentionally, and I hid them well. Why? I was ashamed of my perceived attraction to females. I felt that the label I had given myself was totally against God's will for anyone's life. My thoughts and feelings were sinful, causing me to feel guilty. I prayed for forgiveness over and over again and for God to change me and help me to develop the right kinds of feelings for a male that could lead to true love.

The internal struggle continued, but behavior-wise I never crossed the line by entering into an external relationship with a female. I knew it was wrong and I couldn't have imagined living that kind of life. Genesis 2:24 states: *For this reason*

a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. When I thought of or saw others who outwardly led a homosexual lifestyle, I was disgusted, though I knew that forgiveness could be theirs through the blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). This conviction was partly due to my own conscience as developed by the Holy Spirit, my Christian upbringing and knowledge of God's Law and Grace, and a true desire to follow God's will for my life.

Instead of handling this problem alone for the rest of my life, I chose to share my news with my family. I was tired of harboring these thoughts alone and tearing myself apart because of them. I had already made the decision to seek Christian counseling, but I felt like my family had a right to know before I opened up to anyone else. I was ready to risk having a changed relationship with my family as a result of being totally honest with them. I knew that my parents loved me, but also knew that this news would shock and disappoint them. To think of speaking the words — "I believe I'm gay" — was difficult.

I am thankful that God gave me the courage and desire to share my thoughts aloud and grateful that my parents' reaction was one of love and acceptance. Mixed with those feelings for me were their own feelings of sadness, confusion, and surprise at how they never realized this about me throughout my childhood. My parents' first thought was that I had convinced myself that I was a homosexual.

Though the initial sharing of information was awkward, it was quickly followed by unending support and sympathy. Most importantly, my fam-

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ily prayed continually that God would help me lead the life He intended for me as a young woman. I never regretted informing my parents, and I know now that my life would be markedly different today if I hadn't begun the sharing process when I did.

That was just the beginning of the turning point in my life that led to new understandings about my sexual identity through persons that God placed in my life. Following the revelation to my family were six years full of searching, learning, questioning, and disclosing my internal thoughts with people that I trusted. I wrote letters to various pastors that I knew worked with this issue in the LCMS, and I chose to share my internal conflict with two close female friends. A Christian counselor helped me gain more accurate information about myself and about homosexuality. The counselor taught me homosexuality is a behavior. It's not defined by feelings or what we think when we look at someone.

What was about to unfold was both a display of God's perfect timing in my life and what seemed to me to be nothing short of a miracle.

A special man came into my life shortly after I began counseling, and he stayed in my life throughout the process. He was different from the other men I dated because he was so easy to talk to and he was talkative. We really enjoyed

each other's company and had genuinely fun times together. I often said to myself and to others, "Is he for real?"

Communication and honesty were at the top of our priority list as we spent time together. After three weeks of dating, we both shared our unspeakable stories of the past, and there was mutual understanding, acceptance, and a desire to continue in the relationship. He listened well, and we both worked at completing specific assignments that the counselor gave me.

We trusted that God was doing a work in us that neither of us could do on our own without Him. Our faith life grew together as our friendship-based relationship grew too. We attended church and Bible study together. During times of confusion and doubts, we put our relationship in God's hands as much as we could. Hope was found in the Bible as we read many verses together during our year of dating. One particularly meaningful one, which became our wedding verse, is Jeremiah 29:11, which says: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* We both strongly felt that our union through marriage was God's will for us.

We both took a leap of faith ten years ago at the altar and trusted that God would help us keep our promises made there. And we took another leap of faith as we chose to begin a family seven years ago. While we don't deserve the blessings that God has showered on us through our marriage and children, we are thankful to Him, and we continue to rely on His grace, forgiveness, and promise of eternal life through Jesus.