

Solus

ANONYMOUS

It was October general conference, and I was sitting in the Tabernacle with several friends, attending the priesthood session. The meeting had been especially good, and I was where I most wanted to be, surrounded by close friends, sitting in that sacred building listening to a prophet's voice. President Harold B. Lee spoke as he always did, seemingly off-the-cuff and from the heart, a speech which would become famous throughout the Church. The subject was marriage. Why are there those in the priesthood who are postponing this sacred obligation? Why do some, even among the active brethren, refuse to follow counsel? Such unmarried priesthood bearers are outside of God's house. My friends nudged me good-naturedly. It had become one of the rituals of our association. I wiped mock beads of sweat from my brow and said, "Ouch!"

Looking back on my childhood, I cannot remember how it felt not to be haunted by homosexuality. Not that I would ever have used the word! I was well into middle age before I would bring myself to say "homosexual" even in private prayers—which always concluded with a plea for help in "overcoming my problems."

When I was about six, a stranger had pulled his car up to where I was playing with some friends, and asked for help. He was going to buy groceries and needed someone to help carry them to the car. When I hesitated, he said my parents had told him to find me, so I reluctantly climbed in. What followed was a terrifying experience, one that I have spent a lifetime trying to block out. I was taken up to one of the canyons east of the city and homosexually assaulted. It was both frightening and painful. My own guilt was so heavy that I could never relate the experience to my parents. It has been a heavy burden to bear alone.

Maleness and sexuality became so terrifying to me that I began a long—and successful—flight from my own manhood. As a child I chose girls as playmates, but when adolescence arrived, I could no longer remain exclusively in their company, so I turned back to boys. I soon began "admiring from afar" the masculine qualities I couldn't find in myself.

My junior high school years were an unending nightmare. I was too much of a "sissy" to be accepted by the boys, and my own confusion about sex kept me an arm's length from girls. I took refuge in Church activity. Once a girl in my class asked me to a "preference dance." I bought a corsage, shined my shoes, and reluctantly started off on my first real date. After the dance we went to an

ancient apartment near the business district where all her friends were meeting for a party. After the lights went off, couples started groping and petting in the dark. After a few moments I fled in panic.

My high school years were anxiety-filled but tolerable. I dated infrequently—only enough to avoid suspicion—and I developed my first “crush” on another young man. He was dating the girl who lived across the street. During one whole summer I peered out of the window in a darkened room trying to see him across the street. My feelings of disgust and revulsion at my own actions were exceeded only by my compulsion to watch him. When he made the school basketball team, I went to every game, safely hiding in the anonymity of the crowd. I was always careful not to appear too interested in his scoring.

In college I usually dated only girls with whom I had established a platonic relationship, but once a friend in my priests’ quorum invited me to double date with him. We drove to the canyon and parked. He and his date kissed and petted in the front seat for what seemed an eternity while my date and I sat in the back seat trying to make small talk. I was miserable. Obviously more was expected of me than I was producing. It was a hellish night.

College was interrupted by a draft notice which raised unimaginable anxieties. How would I survive in a totally male environment? Could I mask my “problem?” What if I talked in my sleep? To my great relief, I managed quite well. After basic training I was called on a part-time mission and went out proselyting three nights a week. It got me out of the bawdiness of the barracks, and bunkmates always assumed that the suit and tie meant I was going off on a date. I said nothing to correct their misinterpretation. After two years I was honorably discharged. I felt great: I had held my own in a male society; had not given myself away; had survived group showering even among those I was physically attracted to; and had survived two years without a date and without anyone asking why.

Returning to college was another matter. Parents and friends, whether knowingly or not, were escalating their subtle suggestions that I start dating more frequently. I didn’t date often, but when I did, I got a lot of mileage out of it, making certain everyone knew I had gone out. It was now impossible to avoid kissing without really being suspect, so I tried my best. The whole evening was often ruined by my anxiety about that good-night kiss. There were times when I was certain the girl was deliberately trying to arouse me. What if I failed? All the world would know the truth. Sometimes I pretended she was a boy.

I was rescued by a mission call. To my great relief none of the interviews raised the question of masturbation, and aside from that I was worthy to go. When I was set apart for my mission the general authority said, “Those things in your life which have been amiss have been forgiven.” There it was. God knew after all, but was willing to let me serve as His emissary. Tears ran down my face as I promised not to disappoint Him. My mission was a beautiful religious experience. I grew very close to the gospel. My resolve to put homosexual thoughts behind me worked most of the time, and the garments eliminated much of the sensuality of sleeping with my companion.

The next several years are a blur of parents and bishops and friends and neighbors and former missionary companions and total strangers all asking me the same question: “Isn’t it time you were getting married?” I always answered with good humor (part of the “cover”), but the question always cut me to the

quick. I certainly had not written off the possibility of marriage, but I knew something would have to change. While completing my work at the university, I attended Institute regularly. One Sunday I heard Elder Joseph Fielding Smith say that homosexuality was so filthy and abhorrent that he would rather see his sons dead than homosexual. In growing confusion I tried to analyze my problem. Was I forever lost? Did my eternal destiny hinge on my reaction to a chance encounter with a deviate, when I was too young even to realize what was happening? Was it really a "chance encounter"? Was I given homosexuality as a test to mold or strengthen me? Was there any meaning in my suffering? Would my infirmity be corrected at the Resurrection? Was marriage an absolute requirement for everyone in life? If I married, should I tell my wife? Could I hide it from her? Would Joseph Fielding Smith want me in his family? Would anyone else? Was I better off dead?

For all my pondering, I found only more questions. I decided to ask my stake patriarch for a special blessing. He lived in our ward and knew our family well. While I could not tell him my problem, I could rely on his inspiration for whatever counsel God had for me. I fasted and prayed and went to his home for the blessing. The patriarch gave me a beautiful blessing concerned mainly with choosing a proper career, but he said nothing about marriage or dating.

I decided to try another fast and go to the temple, seeking an answer through prayer and "good works." After asking a temple worker where I might go for private prayer, I was directed to a tiny hall closet. There was no room to kneel, but I offered a lengthy prayer pleading for some direction. I went home and lay awake most of the night, anticipating some message. None came.

The pressure to marry increased almost to my breaking point. It seemed everyone wanted to line me up with "a friend." Even total strangers called and said they had heard of me and wanted to introduce me to somebody special. I started dating with more regularity, hoping that somehow the magic would strike. But a man can go out with the same woman only so many times before the relationship must either end in marriage or be broken off. Somehow we always broke off. The young woman would want to marry, and I could not do it.

About this time the bishop asked me to start teaching the priests' quorum each Sunday. The request brought a new crisis. I was physically attracted to every boy in the quorum. I knew I could do a good job—I had taught classes for years. I felt I could reach some boys who needed strengthening in the gospel. But what if I slipped? The question was larger than just one teaching assignment for a group of priests. I had to know if there were any place in the Church for people "with problems" like mine. Does a homosexual have the right to participate? Was I worthy of a temple recommend? Could I continue to attend all my meetings, teach classes, pay tithing, and accept leadership positions without being a hypocrite? I felt that only a general authority could tell me.

After tremendous soul-searching I went to the Church Office Building, but it took over an hour to get up enough courage to enter the front door. There were so many imponderables. Whom should I ask to see? I certainly didn't want to be told I'd be better off dead. On the other hand, was I being honest if I avoided anyone who might criticize me? Should I use a phony name? My father was well-known enough that someone might connect my name to his. I finally walked in the lobby, scanned the roster of names, and decided on the one who had set me apart as a missionary; perhaps he could help me now.

The secretary said I could not get in without an appointment. Perhaps I could come back another time. My face must have shown my inner turmoil, for she invited me to stay. She took my name and asked the purpose of my visit. I replied "personal counsel" and nervously sat down and waited. Finally, just before 5:00 I was told I could see him. He said he was tired and anxious to spend some time with his family, but he graciously consented to hear me out. I briefly stated my problem, putting it in the best possible light. He seemed to understand, and encouraged me to take the priests' quorum assignment, and any other assignment I was asked to fill. He mentioned a prominent citizen with a similar problem who had recently died, and said much good could be done by those with such problems. As a final thought he suggested that I might aim for more masculine activities in my life, such as playing basketball. The advice was given in good faith and was appreciated. But I wondered if he saw the dilemma. Had I confessed to heterosexual problems, would he have prescribed more physical contact with girls, culminating in the showers?

He concluded by writing an address on a card and directing me to the top floor of the Union Pacific building across from Temple Square. There a kindly gentleman greeted me and asked me to hear his story about the beauty of physical love between a man and a woman. He went into explicit detail, in great humility and candor. He asked me to picture myself capable of such love-making. I really tried. He felt I should marry but counseled me definitely not to tell my wife I was a homosexual as it would strain the relationship too severely.

I left determined to take whatever Church callings came my way. I would live all the commandments possible, and live as normal an existence as possible. But I felt certain that a marriage built upon such a deception could never succeed.

Upon graduation from the university I moved into my own apartment and began teaching high school. My teaching has brought tremendous satisfaction to me. I have developed a reputation for being able to communicate with students no one else could reach. I identify totally with them and am willing to work with them long after most adults have lost all patience.

Like many singles, I fled the marriage pressure in my resident ward and joined a singles ward at the university. Things got better. My parents were pleased just knowing that I was surrounded by all those eligible girls. I appreciated the freedom from interference by neighbors and family, but student wards also exact a price. Marriage is the name of the game, and few priesthood meetings went by without strong reminders of that fact. I was swept up in the new ward activities which weren't exactly dates, but served as good substitutes. I was also named president of the elders' quorum.

My new position forced me to look at the other quorum members more carefully, and I began to wonder if many of them were just like me. Were some dating so frenetically just to remove all doubt about their virility? One that I felt confident shared my problem managed to be seen with a copy of *Playboy* in his briefcase at priesthood meeting. Better to be thought a lecher than a homosexual.

Through this period, my parents, especially my mother, began a not-so-gentle chastising of me, urging me to find the right girl and settle down. My close friends long since married, started inviting me to their home where un-

escorted girls seemed always to be waiting. In my teaching job, I was always being named to the prom committee, along with eligible faculty members.

Before age thirty I could reasonably carry off the charade of being eager to find "the right one." After thirty it got much harder. Any interest in a thirtyish female led inevitably to a tremendous push. I really couldn't blame the woman. However unsatisfactory I might be as a marriage partner, I was male and an active priesthood bearer. Marriage would end for my partners the same kind of nightmarish pressure I was experiencing.

By age thirty-five I decided that dating was terribly unfair to my partners. I was using women only as a convenience, a smoke screen for conformity's sake. I had no right to raise someone's hopes about marriage when my intentions were otherwise, so I quit taking partners to proms, dinners and social gatherings. If people didn't want me along, they soon learned not to invite me.

Outwardly my new resolve was a tremendous relief. Inwardly, it was no answer at all. I learned for myself that it is not good for man to be alone. For the first time in my life loneliness became a gnawing concern. During the winter I had my work, my students, and activities I was expected to attend with or without a partner, but during the summers I could literally go days at a time without speaking a word to anyone. Sometimes the loneliness was so unbearable that I drove up and down the streets hoping to find a hitchhiker with whom I could strike up a brief conversation. My actions were totally circumspect if my thoughts were not.

The worst time of the year was always New Year's Eve. There is simply nothing a single, active Latter-day Saint can do on a New Year's Eve without a partner. Every ward or stake in the Church holds a dance. You either sit at home alone and brood about the passing of the years, or you get a date. On one such occasion I joined the crowd in the traditional kiss at the stroke of midnight. On the way home, my date slid over in the seat and started kissing me again. At her apartment, I made a concerted effort at nominal petting. I tried everything, including the old ploy of thinking of boys. It was awful. I found myself growing physically ill. It was so shoddy I could no longer stand myself. Breaking things off, I left and started home. Soon I was crying so hard I had to pull myself off the road. What does an elder do who knows the gospel is true, who believes fervently in marriage for time and all eternity, who sustains the president of the Church as a prophet of God, and yet is so warped that even kissing a girl can be accomplished only by cheap and demeaning subterfuge?

I arrived at home, undressed for bed, and started to say my prayers. Soon I was sobbing uncontrollably, stifling the sounds in the covers. I knew I couldn't go on without some resolution. For the first time, some thirty years after the fact, I told God I was a homosexual, and begged for help. My initial "Thou knowest of my problem," gave way to "Please, God, you've got to help me deal with my homosexuality; you are the only one I can talk to." I prayed more intimately and familiarly than I have ever done before or since. For about an hour, I poured out my soul, and then went to bed and stared at the ceiling until almost dawn. When I awoke I felt a tremendous peace. God would not require marriage of me in this life. For all the dark corners of my heart, I was still a child of God I would live as exemplary a life as possible and give all I had to the building up of the Kingdom, but I would never marry.

My friends at the Tabernacle continued poking me all through President Lee's talk. My mother later clipped it out of the Sunday paper and had it waiting for me when I arrived for a visit. Another copy arrived anonymously in the mail. Both my bishop and my stake president called me in to talk with me about it. Couldn't I see my mistake? Didn't I sustain the Prophet? What was wrong with me?

During this time I was having trouble with my eyes. I had consulted several physicians who were unable to find the cause. Finally one asked me bluntly, "Is there anything in your life that might be creating undue anxiety?" To my own surprise I found myself answering, "Well I'm forty and still a bachelor." Then I added, "The reason I'm still a bachelor is because males interest me more than females, and I can't very well marry a male."

I couldn't believe myself. There it was, the great secret of my life, the secret around which my whole life had been structured, blurted out to a near stranger. The doctor was as nonchalant as if I had commented about the weather. He asked if I wanted to leave things as they were or if I wanted to work on them. I replied that if my problems were creating enough turmoil inside to affect me physically, maybe I had better do something about them.

He recommended to me a psychiatrist, "very discreet" and new to the area, who would not be apt to have any ties with anyone I knew. The prospect scared me to death. It was finally arranged that the psychiatrist would come to my home every Sunday right after Church. These sessions were extremely helpful and allowed me to understand myself better. But then the psychiatrist advised me that the only way I could end my male fixation was to experience male sex. He reasoned that I might discover that it was not all I had fantasized it to be. While that advice carried a certain logic, and the intellectual side of my nature responded affirmatively, my spiritual side was horrified. Where would I draw the line? If male sex proved unsatisfactory, should I experiment heterosexually?

To whom then should I turn for an answer to my excruciating dilemma? In a lifetime of Church activity I have yet to hear a single word of compassion or understanding for homosexuals spoken from the pulpit. We are more than a family oriented church. Our auxiliaries and priesthood quorums presuppose marriage. A single, much less a homosexual, simply does not fit in. Even the new Special Interest program, which is excellent for those eager to marry, is just one more humiliation in a whole lifetime of humiliations for people like myself. High council members now seek out partners for me, or tell me how to make myself more attractive to the opposite sex. The new program leaves no place to hide. The written temple interview has new questions specifically about masturbation and homosexuality. I must either lie and continue a life of "Let's Pretend," dating often enough to throw the Special Interest committee off my track; or come out of the closet, proclaim my homosexuality openly and pay whatever price must be exacted. I doubt that my community is ready to accept a self-proclaimed homosexual teacher, and it is highly unlikely that the Church will accept a declared homosexual into fellowship.

Still, I have a strong testimony of the gospel. I know the Church is true and I want to remain loyal and active. I can only hope that He who welcomed to His side sinners, publicans and harlots will grant the same grace to me—and that His church will also.