

How Far Out Have You Come?

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Yesterday, October 11th was National Coming Out Day. It is a project of the major GLBT advocacy and lobbying group in Washington, D.C., the Human Rights Campaign

Coming Out Day is about coming out of the closet as a gay person, or L, or B, or T. Coming out as you, whoever you are, is always a struggle. That's why one of Shakespeare's characters gives that advice, "to thine Own self be true." Being true to yourself, knowing who you are, is always hard work, a struggle, and coming out is not always easy. That's why we remember Matthew Shepard on this the tenth anniversary of his kidnapping and murder. "To thine own self be true." Are you true to yourself? Do you need a coming out day?

I would like to think that the hate crime of Matthew Shepard's death is only one extreme. The other extreme for GLBT people is that coming out is easy. I've talked to a few gays who don't understand why it is an issue for so many other gays.

As usual, the truth is in-between. The Human Rights Campaign website has stories of coming out on it. Elizabeth's story she calls, "Coming Out As Batman To My Daughter"

I had been out to myself and my husband for about two years when I decided it was time to tell my then 13-year-old daughter. So I took her for a "girls' day" at the mall and we shopped, had lunch and enjoyed each other's company. Then, heart pounding and hands shaking, I sat her down on a bench and took a deep breath.

"Honey", I said, "I'm ... I'm ..."

Nothing. Nothing came out. I stood there like a landed trout with my mouth opening and closing, thinking of how to say it, thinking of what to say. All I could think of was the scene in the first Batman movie where Bruce Wayne is trying to tell Vicky Vale he's Batman and all he can get out is "I'm .. I'm" Finally, when she leaves the room he gets out, "I'm Batman."

So I took a deep breath and said, "I'm Batman."

My daughter looked me straight in the eyes and said, "I know, Mom."

I said, "No. No, I don't really mean I'm BATMAN! I mean, I'm ... I'm ..."

Again, she looked at me and said, "I know, Mom!"

I said, "You do? I mean, that I'm gay?"

She said, "Yep. And I think it's pretty cool you finally got around to telling ME! I love you, Mom, I think you're great!"

What a kid! I have been truly blessed. Ever since that day, that particular bench at the mall has been known to our family as the Batman Memorial Bench.

<http://www.hrc.org/issues/3767.htm>

We all, straight as well as GLBT, should be grateful for people sharing their stories about coming out. Some times I think that Coming Out ought to be a Rite of Passage for everybody. In our culture, in our religulous, consumerist society, which teaches us to lie about ourselves, being yourself, knowing your true gifts and beauty, just isn't easy. Are you true to yourself? Do you need a coming out day?

The difficulties begin, let's say, in adolescence. As sexuality begins to bloom, adolescents begin to discover new aspects of themselves. Yet also, they are beginning to develop relationships separate from their parents. One of the important developmental tasks is learning not to fully disclose all of who you are. Lying, learning to deceive is an important developmental task in the developmental task of gaining an authentic identity. In nature various species pretend to be other than they are as a form of protection; a praying mantis looking like a stick.

Yet it is a perilous task. We all know that deception can lead to dangerous secret keeping which can poison relationships, and its toxicity can poison a person. Randi Driscoll tells of her friend and fellow musician Dana Lee Wood: "When Dana heard [my] song, she began to sob and immediately began to tell the audience how passionately she felt about this incident. It seemed Dana's brother had taken his own life, due to the pressures he felt being a gay man in today's world. Dana encouraged me to record the song. She pursued me for several weeks, bringing people to shows and talking about Matt's story."

http://www.randidriscoll.com/music_what-matters.html

Secret keeping poisons in various ways. Perhaps King Midas grew his ears because he was already keeping secrets and needed some sort of coming out ritual, other than talking to a hole in the ground. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midas>

An excellent place to find out about secret keeping is Frank Warren's website, <http://postsecret.blogspot.com/>. Some time ago he left 3,000 postcards in a wide variety of places, library, and so on, inviting people to send him their secrets. By 2008, he had received almost 20,000 including secrets written in Portuguese, German, Hebrew, and even Braille.

On his website you can read what people have sent him, such as, "Sometimes, just the act of sharing a painful secret can relieve some of the pain"

One post card he received read, "I want to be in love, but I'm afraid it won't solve all my problems, like I want it to."

Another, “I still haven’t told my father that I have the same disease that killed my mother.”

Here’s one: “I used to fertilize a ring in our lawn every time I mowed it. It grew. My parents still think it was aliens.”

“I can eat a dozen donuts in one sitting.”

“I smile sweetly and pretend to sympathize with my friends who are always fighting with their mothers.... I would give my left arm just to have my mother alive to fight with.”

“My dad died when I was 9 and I convinced myself he’d faked his own death for some reason (undercover agent, chased by the mob, etc.) and that he’d come back someday. When I was 12, I found out from my psychiatrist that this is a pretty stupid idea. I’m 25 now. I still wonder when it’ll be safe for him to come out of hiding and find me.”

“I am so grateful to the psychiatrist I saw when I was nineteen, who told me I would be fine again. He saved my life.”

“I tell people that I don’t believe in God, when really, I just refuse to worship a god that would let my grandfather HURT me like he did.

“I show pictures of my feet to a man online so he’ll buy me stuff.”

“I pulled a muscle in my neck while masturbating. I couldn’t move my head for three days (I told my husband it was from moving furniture)”

“My neighbor was making too much noise, so I cranked up the volume on the stereo. He came over and yelled at my teenaged son. I just stood there and never stood up for my son. I love my son. I’m sorry I did this. I can’t stop my tears as I write this. I’m 60 years old and will never forgive myself....”

One more, a good one to end on this National Coming Out Day.: “Dear Frank, I have made six postcards, all with secrets that I was afraid to tell the one person I tell everything to, my boyfriend. This morning, I planned to mail them, but instead I left them on the pillow next to his head while he was sleeping. Ten minutes ago, he arrived at my office and asked me to marry him. I said, ‘yes.’”

Do you need a Coming Out Day? Do you need a coming out day?

I think it would be a good idea to keep in mind there are a lot of people for whom coming out, whether they are gay or straight, coming out is a luxury. They just don’t know who they are.

Is it possible that people who perform hate crimes are hateful because they've never been allowed to figure out who they are? Russell Arthur Henderson, and Aaron James McKinney kidnapped, pistol whipped and tied Matthew Shepard to a fence. It's been my experience when people do not, cannot identify with another person, they are denying a big part of themselves. Anyone who violates the Golden Rule does not know who he is.

The author of our first reading this morning Joe Bageant, talks about the people who might not have the luxury of sorting out who they are, who might resent people coming out.

If you look across the congregations of these churches, you will see these certainly aren't bad people – just working stiff's whose interior lives were clobbered by the late twentieth century. Theirs is part of the global revival of fundamentalism that occurred when materialism rose triumphant in the wake of the Enlightenment. (Poor dear Enlightenment! So brief! Then smashed by two world wars, Verdun, Dresden, Auschwitz, the gulags, nuclear weapons, and now impending ecological disaster.) Two generations of them were raised in Christian schools amid the unyielding hostility and fear stoked by the Cold War. Is it any wonder they are so drawn to the Apocalypse? From home as they know it in this nation, they look out the window and what they see does look the end of the world. (DEERHUNTING WITH JESUS, page 172)

Bageant's book is about the class warfare that has been going on in the country for a long time. Talk about the need for a Coming Out Day! Bageant speaks of these working stiff's as also American serfs. And many of these people would vote against gay marriage even if it meant voting also against their own economic self interest.

That's what grabs my attention. Why do people vote against their own interests? It is strange to me that a lot of people might vote to privatize Social Security, even though Social Security is the only source of income they have. I don't get it.

It comes down to what is your understanding of yourself. My primary source of economic understanding is Michael Hudson. In a recent column on the \$700 billion bill he speculates on what Congress might eventually do. But then responds, "It is not as if we live in a system where people vote their self-interest." Congress knows the American voter doesn't vote her/his economic self-interest.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/hudson09252008.html>

Our economic identity is one of our little secrets. We need a coming out day about that. We need a coming out day about the class warfare in this county. In the mean time stoning of gays and lesbians will be okay as the Republic of Jesus and other Christian Recontructionist narratives make headway in these hard times. Stoning a lesbian in Iran and tying Matthew Shepard to a fence after pistol whipping him is legal in the Abrahamic tradition. It's alive and well here in America as well as in the Islamic world.

We will not fix what is wrong in our country, we will not heal our world, until everybody, gay and straight can feel safe about coming out as to who they really are. To thine own self be true. We need to find common cause with the American serfs whose world Joe Bageant shares with us.

It is our calling to be agents of reconciliation and healing, to walk in love and peace. We should not remember Matthew Shepard because he died. We need to remember him because he did not allow his fear of coming out to others to get in the way of his message. That is the main reason to remember Matthew Shepard this day.

Dennis Shepard said of his son, "*Matt's gift was people. He loved being with people, helping people, and making others feel good. The hope of a better world, free of harassment and discrimination because a person was different, kept him motivated.*"
<http://www.matthewshepard.org/site/PageServer>

Come out, come out whoever you are. To thine Own self be true. You are lovable, and you are able to love. May this day and every day be your coming out day.



<http://postsecret.blogspot.com/>