

CHAPTER TWO BORN THIS WAY

Who we are is always subject to change. From birth there are events in our lives that scar us, challenge us, enlighten us and inevitably change who we believe we are. Failed relationships, family drama, illness and death all take their toll but I believe that it is *Love* that leaves the most indelible mark. It is *Love* that heals us. It is *Love* that makes us whole. And it is *Love* that will eventually be our salvation.

There is however one thing that I believe to be changeless and that one thing is our sexuality. The true gift we are born with. And I say gift because I truly believe that it is. A gift not unlike the ability to create a beautiful sonnet or write music that brings people to tears. A gift because it is our sexuality – straight, gay, bi, lesbian or transgender - that allows us to express the purest form of love. That allows us communion with another soul through the physical act of sex. That allows us to be completely open and vulnerable with another human being... To be completely *naked*...

We are an amazing people, us Homos, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgenders. We are Artists and Actors. Doctors and Lawyers. Teachers and Pastors. Mothers and Fathers. Athletes and Nerds. I hope one day all of us are able to own that gift and not apologize or make excuses for it. I also hope that one day we are able to see more clearly that it is not just our sexuality alone that defines us. We are multifaceted beings and we need to embrace all aspects of who we are. And don't get me wrong. I love sex. When it's good it is transformational and when it's bad it still doesn't suck (alright, maybe there have been a few times where it really sucked) but it has been my experience that we as a community can sometimes use sex as a way of acting out. Taking our loneliness, or our emotional immaturity, or our deep-rooted sense of self-loathing and attempting to sooth it through the act of sex can become our 'go to' response for the easy fix. I know all of the above

extremely well (we were on a first name basis for decades and they still to this day, have the propensity to drop by uninvited at the worst possible moments) and although my sexuality has never been something I struggled with, my ability to live a fearless life in regard to it has been.

Using sex as a Band-Aid isn't necessarily the best way to heal emotional wounds. Fun? *Absolutely!* A great way to get out of our heads? *Hell yeah!* The best way to deal with emotional baggage? *Not so much.* Reaching out for comfort through the physical act of sex is a natural way of reacting to emotions, both negative and positive but dealing with the underlying issues must become part of the process. Otherwise we can live in a perpetual state of what is equivalent to an emotional 'sugar rush'. We get high from the sex and then crash winding up feeling vulnerable and alone. Solution? Woo hoo! More sex!!! Which tends to start a vicious cycle that can be incredibly hard to break free from. What can be incredibly simple though, if we so choose, is to understand why we have such a heavy investment in our sexuality. We've had to explain it and defend it our entire lives. We have never had the opportunity to be defined as anything else in society's mind. First and foremost we are known as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender men and women. Not as men and woman who happen to be gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender. How could our sexuality not become the focal point of our existence? It is truly a tragedy that something so simple and so basic has become a vicious, mean-spirited way for the 'righteous' to persecute us and lead us to believe we should live lives veiled in shame. It boggles the mind that we live in a world capable of putting a man on the moon and breaking down the body's anatomy to the smallest of cells and yet there are people who can't wrap their heads around the idea that homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality. It's as if once human sexuality enters an equation all reason disappears and fear takes control of the conversation. And we have allowed their fear to dictate how we live our lives by adopting their flawed mentality... A mentality that tells us that we need to apologize and repent for who we are.

In the past, there were moments where I knew outing myself would have caused a major issue in either my family life or at the work place... Moments such as, a holiday dinner with family when an aunt would ask “So, do you have a girlfriend yet?” or at my first office job where I felt I had to bite my tongue as fellow employees cracked homophobic jokes... And instead of living my truth, what did I do? Well, usually one of two things... Silence or a lie... Then I would walk away kicking myself knowing that I had completely sold out and feeling shame about what I had just done and worse, who I was. Why did I do that? Why not just go balls to the wall and say ‘This is who I am and if you have a problem with that, then that’s your drama and I hope some day you’re able to work through it.’ Simple answer is this. On some level, I felt I was damaged. Sad but true... Somewhere deep inside there was a part of me that bought into society’s lie about who I was, someone who was less than. And after each one of those moments I felt as if I had given a piece of myself away and indeed I had. It was the part of me that knew better, as we all do. That part of us that knows we have nothing to be ashamed of, because there really was no moment of choice on our part in regard to our sexuality. No conscious decision. No need to give the finger to society and live in the shadows without basic civil rights. We truly were born this way. And although we now live in a country where fair-minded individuals are beginning to reinforce the idea that LGBTQ youth should stand proud in who they are, until their home environments, churches, schools and government all reflect that same thought system they will continue to struggle.

There is a natural process that many of us in the LGBTQ community are excluded from. And because of this exclusion, a lifelong struggle in regard to our own ability to be self-accepting is born. That process? That valuable puzzle piece missing from our adolescent experience? *The ability to grow into our sexuality with dignity and complete acceptance.* We, unlike our heterosexual counterparts, are not afforded the luxury of coming home and telling our parents we have a crush on another little boy or girl. Or of going out on a date with said little boy or girl and having our parents support... Or taking our boyfriend or

girlfriend to Prom... Or sharing the moment of our first kiss with our peers... Instead we are taught that the feelings and emotions we are experiencing are 'sinful' and 'unnatural'. So what do we do? We learn to hide them and we learn to lie about them. And because as children we believe, without question, what the adults in our lives teach us about ourselves and the world, the idea that we are somehow flawed seeps into the very core of who we believe we are and plants seeds of inadequacy and self-loathing. Which in turn lays a foundation of shame that for many of us festers just below the surface, sabotaging the likelihood of having a healthy functional relationship with ourselves or with others. Sex becomes a convenient way of masking our feelings and also allows us to remain in a perpetual state of adolescence, never truly trusting or owning who we are. How could anyone possibly develop a healthy relationship to his or her sexuality with such a valuable piece of the puzzle missing? It's a miracle we are able to function at all. Think about how drastically different our lives would be if we were able to speak freely and with complete honesty about the natural process of discovering who we are. Imagine not fearing being disowned or shunned by family and friends. Imagine complete acceptance. Now imagine that for future generations. We owe them that. We owe them the ability to stand proud in the knowing that, who they are, is exactly who they were intended to be.

We in the LGBTQ community must begin to see the power we possess and begin to live with gratitude for being born into this amazing life. And just because we have been dealt a hand that may be more challenging to play, realize that the payoff far outweighs any pain we have lived thus far. And, when we arrive at that place of knowing, we will discover that, who we are, is truly a blessing... And just a reminder to those of us now fortunate enough to live within the bubble of a large city (a bubble where being part of the LGBTQ community is 'acceptable'): We must always keep in mind the struggle of our brothers and sisters who don't have that luxury. Who, on a daily basis, must pretend to be people they are not for fear of being either physically or emotionally bullied or worse yet, being tortured and killed. And it is this

pretending which leads to the sense of shame we feel in regard to who we are. And make no mistake about it; shame is an insidious little beast. It has one purpose and one purpose only. To destroy... Pretending it's not there is a dangerous game because no matter how hard we try to keep it at bay, it eventually rears its ugly little head in incredibly destructive ways. Alcoholism, substance abuse, depression or sexual addiction just to name a few... This boogey monster needs to be dragged out into the light and exposed for the fraud that it is. A lie taught to us by people who were or still are ignorant. Who are clueless as to who we actually are and what we have the right to express. Yes, the right... The right to walk hand in hand with our partners in the brilliant light of day... Not to simply be 'tolerated' but to be *accepted* and valued.

SIDEBAR: *For me, the word 'tolerance' implies that one behavior is somehow better than another and that the one being tolerated is somehow less than the one exhibiting the 'acceptable' behavior. No one should be 'tolerated' because of who they are.*