

## My Story by Louis

My story is that I began to feel an attraction to men in high school, before then I had a very messed up sense of my sexuality because of childhood sexual abuse. When I read research that talked about childhood sexual abuse being common among men who struggle with homosexuality, it struck a chord with me, it was my story. Although I was attracted, I did not do anything about it. I dated girls in high school and had a good time. I had sex with women after high school, and a few relationships, though short lived. I did not have sex with men until I was 24 and then I lived openly as a gay man. This lasted until I was almost 35. Though I had had sex with women before, gay men did not think of me as bisexual. For them it was an "experimental stage" that I went through. I went to bars, danced with men, had one night stands and lived a very self indulgent life. Every conversation seemed to be filled with sexual innuendo. I looked around myself and well over half of the men I knew had AIDS.

I wanted to have a safe and monogamous life. First I decided I would not have sex with men I just met, but would hold out for a man who would get to know me first. I got no takers, though still offers for instant gratification sex. Then I decided I would just live a chaste life rather than just sleep around and never have a relationship. Funny thing, I noticed my interest in homosexual relationships begin to diminish. It reminded me of when I quit smoking. The cravings diminished rapidly.

Then I knew I could make the choice to leave homosexuality. It was challenging the first few years, but it became consistently easier over time. Today I have no desire for men and my memories of once enjoying it seem strange to me. I am more interested in women now than I ever was in men. It is a much deeper and more serious appreciation that comes from realizing the opportunity to procreate and grow old together. I never knew anyone who had this type of relationship in the gay lifestyle and when I looked for it, it was no where to be found. I have not been gay for 13 years now and I am not frustrated or "missing out" on anything.

Many aspects of reparative therapy (and other elements basic to all effective therapy) were a strong component of my change process. No longer indulging in self pity, building my self esteem, and developing healthy boundaries and appropriate relationships with heterosexual men helped me to "demystify" them and see myself as one of them.

Being accepted as a peer and equal among other men played a big part in my acceptance of myself. As my self esteem grew, I no longer found the prospect of bringing a man into my life to be acceptable. I stopped looking for masculinity outside of myself because of some falsely perceived deficit inside myself. Over time, I built a true identity of recognizing masculinity inside myself and became the man in my life. This led to an increase in heterosexual desire, since I began to realize that relationships with women could complete me by bringing into my

life what I did not have myself. At the same time, sexualized relationships with other men became undesirable and only competed with my sense of self.

My story is one of religion and psychology working hand in hand. It is a story of growth in intellectual, emotional and spiritual directions. I often read books about reparative therapy, Nicolosi and Gerard Van Den Aardweg and spoke about my emotional and psychological growth in group sessions with religion based ex gay ministries. It was always welcome to share faith affirming psychological insights in group and together the two influences provided a great synergy that boosted me along in my recovery. Recovery was a process that brought growth and healing from homosexuality for me. Also, a 12 step recovery program helped me understand how my life was out of control and showed me a way to regain control. recovery from homosexuality combined the best of psychological addiction treatment and faith based spirituality. (I believe Jung had something to do with the beginnings of AA and 12 step recovery.)

Another point of agreement between religion based change efforts and psychology was that of cultural accommodation and multiculturalism. Gay activists often speak of sexual orientation as being a culture and then make claims of discrimination from that point of view. The people I knew were successful in their change efforts because they had stopped elevating homosexual desire and behavior to the status of identity. They instead viewed it as undesirable thoughts and behaviors. They came to see the church's claim that homosexuality was sinful to be empowering and not condemning, since change from sinful ways is possible and religion can help.

These same people saw much help available in psychology since help changing unwanted thoughts and behaviors is the domain of psychology. We shared in common the view that gay activism was condemning since they offered no hope of change and threatened those who would choose change with false claims of harm, and often real threats in the form of bullying.

In summary, it was psychology, in the form of reparative therapy that supported my cultural and faith based identity, that got me started and carried me through in my journey to experience a genuine, safe and lasting change in my sexual orientation.