**An Interview with Change**

*by Bob*

I know people can change. Maybe not all men; I don't know that. But I know some people can and do change. I am living proof.

Eleven years ago I was consumed with homosexual feelings. My every thought was based on same-sex attraction (SSA). I fought those feelings because they didn't seem to fit, they were not how I saw myself, not what I wanted for my life - but I felt powerless against them. Whatever I did to struggle against homosexual desires only seemed to make them comeback stronger.

That was my life for over 20 years. But now, after more than three years of inner-healing work, I can honestly say I have no sexual desire for men. Those feelings are gone. In fact, I sometimes forget I ever even struggled with homosexuality. It's such a 180 degree turn.

Q. So what happened? What caused this dramatic change after so many years of struggle?

A. I began to discover and finally deal with the root causes of my same-sex attraction (SSA) – the developmental issues like abuse and bullying and other things that had inadvertently and unconsciously caused me to develop same-sex desires. After years of trying to pray the attractions away, wish them away, trying willpower and more and more religious zeal, at last I discovered reparative therapy and books and other resources that showed me a way out. I began uncovering and healing the underlying wounds and emotional pain, and as I did, my sexual desire for men began to dissipate, then disappear.

It was a miracle - but not the overnight miracle I had prayed for all those years. It was a hard-work miracle, where God led me to new resources and support and knowledge and people. He led me through the difficult, painful work of healing that I needed to do.

Q. What kind of healing?

A. Before, I was powerfully attracted to men sexually, but I didn't like them as people. I craved their bodies and their attention, but I didn't like men in a fraternal, platonic way. I didn't want to be around them. I didn't feel like one of them.

In therapy, I uncovered abuse issues and dealt with the lingering impact of peer abuse and bullying in my past, as well as my disaffection from my father and other men. I discovered how those things had put me on a track of isolation and alienation from other males and from my own masculinity that I had been unconsciously trying to heal through homosexual lust, without ever realizing that's what was driving those feelings. I had this lusthate relationship with men where I wanted them sexually but I had vengeful feelings for them at the same time.

Q. Has that changed now?

A. Oh, absolutely. Now it's completely the opposite. Now I love being around guys, but have no desire to have sex with them. I want to hang out with them, be one of the guys with them. I have amazing friendships, very deep friendships that have resulted from me doing the inner healing work that I've done. These are men with whom I can share my darkest secrets, men who have stood by me and supported me as I explored the most painful parts of my past, and allowed me to be there in the same way for them. I've experienced real friendships for the first time in my life.

Q. What about attractions to women?

I discovered I have a natural interest in women that feels good and right and pleasurable.

A. Before, I couldn't feel attraction to women because I had this intense, almost compulsive desire for men that was blocking me. With that out of the way, I discovered I have a natural interest in women that feels good and right and pleasurable. I've been dating women for the past year or two, and I find it's far more satisfying than my sexual desires for men ever were.

I'll admit it's not as intense - and to me, that's a good thing. My homosexual desires were obsessive, lustful and overpowering. They were more about dominating other men, having power over men. There was almost a sense of revenge. There was almost a sense of revenge.

In contrast, my heterosexual desires are more peaceful, more joyful. They feel more about giving, where my homosexual desires had been more about taking. In being with a woman, I feel like I am coming from a place of wholeness. Before, when I craved men, it felt like I was coming from a wounded place, a place of emptiness. It's very different. And so much more right for me.

Q. How else have you changed? What differences do others see in you?

A. They see someone who is more confident, less fearful, more powerful. Someone who is more in touch with his emotions, and more able to express emotions in a frank and mature way. Before, the only emotion I was aware of was lust.

Q. So you had been stuck for a long time, dissatisfied with your SSA feelings but unable to stop feeling them. What happened to finally put you on the road to change?

A. I had been getting closer and closer to experimenting with the gay scene. In my mind, my fantasies, I had been a raging homosexual for a long time, but I'd never acted on it with anyone else. But my resolve was steadily weakening. I was feeling increasingly compelled to have sex with men, like it was inevitable, only a matter of time. But the closer I got to that, the more miserable I became.I was even more miserable the closer I got to acting on them.

It didn't make sense to me. I had thought the reason for my misery was that I was denying and suppressing my true desires, or my true self. If homosexuality was right for me, I expected to find some peace and comfort in accepting it. But the opposite was happening. Instead of feeling more contented when I told myself that this is who I really was, and what I really needed to do was let go of my inhibitions and embrace a gay life, I was ever more unhappy. It's like I was miserable not acting on these feelings, but I was even more miserable the closer I got to acting on them.

I was at the end of my rope. I was going to church every day, reading scriptures, abstaining from sex. Nothing was helping. I believed I couldn't follow my faith and live a gay life. My religion kept me out of a gay lifestyle for a long time. But after awhile I was worn down repressing myself. I told God I'm just going to experiment with the gay scene and see what happens. I'll go to the bars, maybe meet someone. If this isn't what you want me to do, God, then "heal" me. I wanted a flash of light, to be healed in a moment. He healed the lepers, why not me?

At my moment of deepest desperation, I got up from that prayer, walked out to the vestibule, and for the first time ever saw a handbill for Courage, a Catholic group of men with same-sex attraction who support each other in living a chaste life. It said the group meets at the church once a week. I thought, well there's no way I would ever be seen attending a group like that, but I was thrilled and relieved to know for the first time in my life that there was a resource out there for someone like me.

I went to the Courage web site and found a link to NARTH (National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality). I couldn't believe it! They had actual therapy for this! I called NARTH to learn more about what they called reparative therapy. I was told it would involve delving into my past, releasing long-buried emotions, looking at childhood experiences, talking about my deep dark secrets.

"No way would I ever do that!" I thought, and hung up. Then the thought came powerfully into my mind, "Well, you've been trying it your own way all these years, alone and in secret. How has that been working for your?" It was a moment of tremendous clarity. I don't believe it would be too strong to call it a message from God.

All those years I'd been looking for a miracle on my own terms: It had to be painless, and no one must ever know. Those were my conditions, and I had resented God for a long time for not giving me the miracle I wanted, under my conditions.

Now I was facing a different kind of miracle. A miracle I'd have to work for. A miracle on his terms, not mine. So I called NARTH back and got a referral to a therapist. That phone call was a turning point for my life as I had known it.

Q. What did your therapy and other healing work entail?

A. Just as I'd been told - delving into my past. Uncovering old pain around childhood experiences. Releasing old feelings that I'd kept locked up under a layer of lust all those years to avoid the grief, fear, shame and anger that I'd never really dealt with.

I started reading anything I could get my hands on from a reparative therapy perspective - Nicolosi, Medinger, Eldridge. Their books helped me better understand my desire for men and masculinity. I learned it was a natural drive for gender connection that had been misdirected into sexual desire because of trauma involving other males as well as my own sensitivity and insecurity. That's the essence of the "reparative drive" - a drive to connect with the masculine. I could try making that connection through homosexual sex, or I could revisit the wounds of the past and heal them in the present. I could connect with the masculine in healthy, positive ways now - connections I had missed when a boy is normally bonding with buddies, dads, brothers and mentors, and developing a secure identity as "one of the guys."Early on, my therapist told me there was this experiential weekend called "Journey Into Manhood" that he thought would be good for me. Again, I thought, "No way would I ever do that!" To be seen at a group like that? To expose my woundedness and pain to a group of strangers? Never! At that point, I hadn't even met my therapist face to face yet!

But as soon as I said "no way," I was reminded again how I'd been trying to control this on my own all those years - and failing miserably at it. Now I was at a point in my life where I was ready to give it my all. So I got on a plane and flew to Maryland. This was the first time I would ever disclose my struggle with SSA to any other human being face to face. It was terrifying. And a huge step forward for me.

It was at Journey Into Manhood (JiM) that I was able to look another man directly in the eye for the first time and risk being emotionally vulnerable. JiM helped me to feel accepted by other men to begin to see myself as a man - something I realized I had never done before. These breakthroughs motivated me to push forward. I wanted more!

At Journey Into Manhood I heard about New Warriors, another experiential healing weekend, not for SSA men but for men from all walks of life, to help them deal with emotional baggage and find their mission in life and passion for life. A couple months after the Journey weekend, I was ready for another challenge, to move forward again in a big way, so I signed up for the New Warrior Training Adventure.

All my life I had felt alienated and different from other men. At the New Warrior Training Adventure, I got to be deeply authentic with other men, and they were deeply authentic with me. I discovered how much I was like other men, that even though they did not struggle with SSA, they had similar struggles and similar work to do. New Warriors gave me a framework with which to do my work, and a community of men to support me in my healing path.

Q. It sounds like a lot of work!

A. Definitely. And it could be frightening and emotionally painful work too. But I cannot express strongly enough how worth it the journey has been for me. The rewards have been tremendous. The healing has been profound. The friendships I've gained along the way have been life-changing. I'll never, never regret this miracle I worked so hard for and took such emotional risks to receive. I'll forever be thankful to God that he showed me the way out of the trap I was in, and led me to people and resources that could truly help.

Q. Do you have any words of encouragement or caution to anyone just starting out on this road to change? It is absolutely doable if it's something you really want and you are willing to do the work.

A. First, it is absolutely doable if it's something you really want and you are willing to do the work. My experience is far from unique. Countless people can share personal experiences similar to mine. Don't listen to so-called experts who are more interested in their own political agendas and winning professional accolades than they are in supporting you in what you want out of your own life.

Second, there are more resources out there today supporting change, and more knowledge and experience with what works, than ever, probably in the history of the world. And they are more accessible to more people than ever. It may be hard to see that at first because the opposition to change is so loud and angry. But the help is there for you if you seek it out.

Third, you can't do it alone. SSA is a symptom of deeper relationship problems, and you can't overcome relationship problems in secrecy and isolation. It doesn't work that way. You have to get the help. You have to do the work.

Finally, it does take work. Change is a journey, not a stop at a drive-through window on the way to somewhere else. It doesn't happen all at once, and it's usually not quick. The experiences and feelings that created SSA didn't happen all at once, and uncovering and resolving them won't happen all at once either.

But you know what? If you are deeply conflicted over strong SSA feelings, that's a clear sign that you've got deep emotional work to do anyway. And if, like me, doing that difficult work leads to greater peace, greater confidence, greater happiness, and getting needs met in healthy and meaningful ways, it will be the best thing you ever do for yourself.