**The Way OUT**

*by Jason*

It has been seventeen years since I resolved my homosexual problems. I use that word purposely. I am not suppressing the feelings. I have filled the underlying needs that created the homosexual attractions, and the problems are resolved. I am happy to say I no longer struggle with homosexuality. It no longer controls my life.

On rare occasions, I still experience a homosexual attraction, but I can dismiss it with minimum effort. It doesn't prevent me from maintaining healthy friendships, marriage, and peace of mind. In the past, when I'd walk by a good-looking man, I would turn around and follow him and undress him in my mind. I would fantasize about how it would be to be in a relationship with him. Within seconds, in my mind, I had moved in to his apartment and for the rest of the day I would be living my life with him in my mind.

Now when I pass the same man on the street, I acknowledge his good looks and leave it at that. It is healthy to notice men and women and be attracted to their good qualities. But I don't fantasize jumping into bed with them. I may admire their good characteristics and have an interest in getting to know them, but as a healthy friendship.

Today I have many good friends and feel fulfilled in male relationships. I feel comfortable with men at work and at my church. I am happy and fulfilled in my marriage and in my roles as husband and father. Through the experiences I have had, I have learned about patience, mercy, and repentance. I have learned a bit about the workings of a loving Heavenly Father in my life. I am a lot less judgmental than I used to be. I've learned that sometimes people have internal struggles that are tremendous, and I admire them for their courage-even though outwardly they may not think they measure up to other people. I don't think I would have learned these lessons had I not had the struggles I've had. I am at peace.

I want to let people know it is possible to make important changes in their lives. We hear much in the media today saying that if you're gay you're born that way and you can't change it. Some people are happy with that, but there are also many like me who are not happy with it and want something else for their lives. I feel sorry for those who feel they are locked in to it and have no choices. I finally found answers, explored my options, and made informed decisions for myself.

**Early Life**

I grew up in a pretty normal church-going family. I was the kind of boy who needed to sit on his daddy's lap, but my father was a traveling salesman and wasn't home very often. I was a sensitive child who needed buddies and wanted to have fun. I had one or two childhood friends, but mostly watched them from the window and wished I could be out playing with them.

I did well in school and since everything in my life appeared to go well, dad had no reason to be concerned about me and become more involved in my life. I didn't force him into my life emotionally, so he didn't get involved emotionally. I floated along with the tide patiently waiting for something emotional to happen.

My parents didn't push me into sports or other activities that would have given me the chance to connect more with other boys. I became attracted to that unknown.

I withdrew and became a loner, convincing myself I didn't need anybody. During recess at school, I seldom played with other children, but would walk around the grass field, projecting myself into fantasy worlds. Because I didn't interact with other boys; I didn't exchange ideas, thoughts, fears, and questions with them. They were unknown to me. And later in life, I became attracted to that unknown.

By age 9, I had developed the habit of blocking out love. I longed for the companionship of my brother four years my senior and felt lonely when I was excluded from activities with his friends. I begged to play with him or go with him, and when he would concede, I would refuse. Even when he offered his companionship, I refused it for fear of hurt or rejection. At the same time, I felt angry that the opportunity for companionship and attention had passed me by. I think I had a secret fear that I was not worthy of companionship or attention. Therefore, I chose to stay where it was safe and familiar, rather than venture out and discover on my own that I was really ok.

I didn't participate in sports at school or in the neighborhood, and I learned few of the rules of basketball, football, or baseball. I hated physical education at school and the dumb exercises and relay races. I was always the last to be chosen for baseball teams (even after the girls!). In the batting lineup I would say that I had already batted, and slip to the end of the line.

My earliest recollection of being attracted toward other males was about age 12. Going through puberty and adolescence, I never labeled myself homosexual; I thought I had normal sexual attractions. However, in retrospect, I can see how they were clearly directed toward males even though I was almost 30 before I admitted to myself that the attractions I experienced were homosexual attractions.

I discovered pornography at about age 15, and was aroused by female pornography. However, my family and church taught me to respect women, and so I felt guilty looking at naked women. When I found a Playgirl magazine, I found it at least as interesting as Playboy, and somehow I didn't feel the same guilt looking at naked men. It seemed more normal, since men saw each other naked in locker rooms. I may also have been more attracted to male than female bodies, because male bodies are inherently leaner than female bodies, and I am attracted to fit, lean bodies. (Even today, I don't know whether I was originally more attracted to male than female pornography, or if I focused on male bodies because I felt less guilty looking at men than women. Then, having focused on it, I'm sure it had some role in shaping my concepts of sexuality.)

I was propositioned at age 16 by a clothing salesman in a dressing room. Although I was intrigued by it, I knew what he was suggesting was wrong, and I had no desire to meet him in the restroom. I left the store quickly.

In college, since I worked 30-40 hours a week with a full-time schedule, I didn't spend much time with roommates. On Saturdays, when I saw them watching a basketball game on TV, I just thought of all the homework I needed to do and considered their activities a waste of time. I unconsciously withdrew from the typical college male scene. And as the rift between us grew bigger, I wanted it more and more.

I believe I have been vulnerable all my life, but I received just enough support and good vibes from my family and peers to carry me through my younger years.

However, when I left home for college and was on my own, I struggled to come to terms with my identity, and homosexual feelings that were just under the surface came to light.

I struggled even more with my identity as I accepted the responsibilities of marriage at age 27. I had my "midlife crisis" at age 30 as I came to terms with the fact that I was no longer a care-free twenty-something. I felt the void of not having experienced some of the things I wanted to experience in my teens and twenties.

**Coming to Grips with Homosexual Feelings**

At age 31, after four years of marriage and three children, I finally admitted I had a homosexual problem and had to determine what to do about it. I thought long and hard about whether this was what I wanted for my life. It didn't fit with being married and having kids - and I wanted my wife and children. It didn't fit with my personal values or my understanding of God's eternal plan for me. If I were going to be married, which I wanted to be, I had to be committed and monogamous. So sexual feelings toward other men didn't fit. I couldn't bear the thought of giving up my marriage and family for the option of a life with another man.

Nevertheless, for the next three years I struggled in the dark, not knowing what to do or who to turn to for help. I thought it might help to talk things out with a therapist. I had a few visits with two different therapists, but both of them had already decided what was best for me and I didn't feel it would be an objective situation. The first couldn't understand the conflict I felt between these feelings and my religious and personal values. She suggested I simply accept myself as I was and do what felt good. She didn't encourage me to define what I wanted from life or work for anything better. The other therapist told me within the first few minutes of my first session that my religious values were my obvious problem and that they should be discarded. But I couldn't simply dismiss the values and beliefs that I held so deeply.

During these three years, I fell in and out of love with several men. One of them seemed to be "Mr. Right," and I was seriously considering moving in with him three weeks after I met him. I was emotionally needy, and so caught up in the positive strokes I got from him, that I thought I had found my perfect partner. I was willing to leave my wife, my children, and my church for a man I'd known for three weeks.

**Finding My Way Out**

Near my 34th birthday, I overheard a man talk about his work in counseling people with homosexual problems. When I called him a few weeks later, he told me that men were finding success in working with therapists and support groups.

There were new theories in the psychological field that viewed homosexuality as an emotional issue and looked at the reasons behind the attractions. This made sense to me and I found hope. It eventually lead me to answers to questions I had my whole life.

Therapy with this man was very helpful. Since I am a fairly analytical person, he helped me look at the situation objectively and weigh my options. I had someone to talk with and process ideas. I had someone I could trust to discuss these intimate issues. He was genuinely concerned about me and I didn't worry about being manipulated, like I did with the previous therapists I had visited.

We talked about relationship skills and how to interact with other men. We explored the relationships I had. It helped me see how fulfilling or unfulfilling they were and what I wanted from relationships. I realized this was a major deficit for me and I made plans to develop the kind of relationships I realized I needed.

We talked about relationship skills and how to interact with other men. I realized that I unconsciously pushed people away, and my therapist gave me support and ideas on the skills I needed to build. After I practiced some skills and found success, my confidence grew and I reached out more.

My therapist suggested I attend a self-help support group of other men who were also struggling with unwanted homosexual feelings. I attended the Phoenix group for a while, then Evergreen just after it was formed in 1989. The support group experience helped me open up on an emotional level and relate with other men to a degree that I had never done before. It was a protected, safe environment with other men who knew my deep, dark secrets and had the same deep, dark secrets. I could open up with them in a safe practice environment, then later apply it with straight men in the real world.

The men in my support group understood my feelings and helped me find solutions to my problems. When I felt depressed, I called them and they talked me out of desires to act sexually. I became good friends with several of them and knew they were genuinely concerned about me and I was genuinely concerned about them. I relied on them many times and never would have made it without their love and support. I had some great growing experiences in the three and a half years I attended support group meetings.

Over the next four years, I read a lot of books and articles and learned from the experiences of others. Not all the theories I read applied to me, but I learned something from each one. I also prayed a lot and worked at building a better relationship with God. I wrote in my journal faithfully. I found it to be a healthy way to process my feelings and experiences. I also found it helpful to read over previous entries to get a perspective on how I had progressed. I devoted a lot of effort in reaching out and building healthy male relationships.

My lack of knowledge and skill in sports was one thing that separated me from mainstream guys. My therapist also ran a sports group where guys like me who had never been involved much in team sports could learn the rules of the game and build skills in a safe, non-threatening environment. That was very helpful for me because my lack of knowledge and skill in sports was one thing that separated me from mainstream guys. Being involved in sports forced me to face many childhood fears and it was a growing experience to face and conquer them. It also helped increase my self-esteem and confidence to interact with other men.

**What I Learned Through this Experience**

I learned that my homosexuality was caused by many factors. There may have been some biological predisposition, but that doesn't seem to be a large factor for many people, and it appears that, for me, personality and environment played the major roles. I was a fairly sensitive boy. I needed a lot of peer support and relationships, and had very little of either growing up.

Many men with homosexual problems have deficits relating with other men.

I also learned that my homosexuality was not essentially a sexual problem - it was an emotional one. My problems existed because basic, normal emotional needs were not being met. I learned that many men with homosexual problems have deficits relating with other men. Like me, they feel that somehow they never quite fit in as "one of the guys." So I tried (consciously or subconsciously) to fill unmet emotional needs in any way we could. I had normal, healthy needs to relate with other men, to feel accepted by them, and to be affirmed by them, but things got in the way as I grew up and the needs didn't get met. Even though I became an adult chronologically, I was still a teenager emotionally and had relationship needs that still needed to be filled.

Once I figured out what the issues were for me and began to take care of the underlying emotional deficits, the attractions and sexual compulsions decreased.

When I found healthy, non-sexual ways to take care of the emotional needs, I didn't need to look at pictures of men or find some stranger to connect with. What I really wanted and needed were legitimate friendships with men. Once I fulfilled the underlying emotional needs, the homosexual desires disappeared.I discovered that I have some needs that can be met only by other men. I need to bond with men and be affirmed by them. I need close buddies I can relate to and do things with on a male level. I also have needs that can be met only by women.

Every man needs both men and women because of the complementary nature of the two genders. Men will never be totally fulfilled if they relate exclusively with other men; women bring a necessary component to the equation. There is something about the Mars-Venus concept that naturally attracts men and women together because it helps us grow, gives us balance, and makes us whole.

I also learned that this is a difficult process that takes time. Attitudes and experiences developed over decades can't usually be turned around in months.

When I finally began to confront my problems and make up for the deficits, I was on an emotional roller coaster because I was opening up emotionally, confronting new issues, and experiencing some feelings for the first time. I went from highs to lows - sometimes within hours. Time was condensed; I was growing emotionally perhaps a year every month or two. I was trying to build relationships with other men, initially with those in my support group who had the same kinds of emotional deficits I did. In many ways,

I was growing emotionally in areas I should have experienced back in my teenage years, and it was difficult to do some things as an adult that should have been done when I was an adolescent.

The journey has been the hardest thing I've ever done, but it was worth it.

Today, I am a different man -- stronger, healthier, happier, more loving, more confident, more mature. I am a better father, a better husband, a better friend, and a more devoted son of God. I would never trade the peace, growth and healing I have experienced for anything in the world