

## **Becoming The Man I Was Attracted To**

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(Posted 2013)

### **Hope At Last**

I was 22 years old in 1990 when yet another fruitless counseling session with yet another therapist came to its weekly close. For four years, I had sought help from parents, three therapists and numerous spiritual advisors in a largely unsuccessful and frustrating effort to find a way free from the compulsive homosexual longings that tormented me. Now, almost as an afterthought, this therapist told me something that would change the course of my life: A group of men who were supporting each other in overcoming homosexuality had recently formed an organization called Evergreen in Salt Lake City, and they were about to host their first conference. I soon found myself driving 400 miles to attend the first Evergreen conference.

One of the most inspiring moments at the conference for me came when keynote speaker Jeff Konrad, author of "You Don't Have to be Gay," related the story of his own recovery. He was a man who once had been caught up in the gay lifestyle but, through years of hard spiritual and emotional work, had finally found healing.

I was also introduced for the first time to a therapeutic model that emphasized the need for a conflicted homosexual to "repair" his male selfimage and broken male relationships of his childhood and youth.

I learned that I hadn't been able to pray away my homosexual attractions because they were not, at their roots, a spiritual problem. The unwanted attractions were symptoms of emotional problems that I needed to resolve, not be relieved of. I hadn't been able to force opposite-sex attractions because my more basic, core need for male identity and masculine affirmation had not yet been met adequately. Until I felt fully masculine, I would never feel "man enough" for a woman.

Alive with hope at last, I returned from the conference and immediately began working with a new therapist I had met there who was experienced with reparative therapy. He helped me work through gender insecurity issues and correct my many misperceptions of maleness and the male world - everything from the meaning of spontaneous erections to my unrequited longing for normal male friendships, both of which I had grossly misinterpreted as indications that I was probably "born gay." These misunderstandings had in turn become somewhat of a self-fulfilling fixation on homosexual thoughts, feelings and culture.

### **Overcoming Gender Insecurity**

With my therapy clearly focused now on my masculine development as a boy and my sense of gender inadequacy, I began to reinterpret my history in a whole new light -- a light that illuminated my present turmoil. I recalled a childhood of emotional turmoil and confusion. The boys who were in my class played rough-and-tumble games during recess. I never joined in. I didn't know how to play the games and was afraid of getting hurt. I felt so uncoordinated.

Since I didn't play with other boys during recess, I found a group of girls to spend time with. We played jump rope and "house" and climbed on the monkey bars. We played "Star Wars," and I always got to be Luke Skywalker. He was strong and courageous and a hero everyone liked. This was the kind of play that was comfortable and "safe" for me; I avoided the humiliation that inevitably came with playing with the boys.

Even while I avoided boys, I desperately wanted to have other boys as friends. I wanted to hang out with them, join in their games and feel like I fit in. I wanted to belong. In P.E., all the other boys were so much better at the activities than I. While their bodies were developing and starting the path toward manhood, I was skinny and undeveloped. I was embarrassed with my body and tried to be very modest so the other boys wouldn't notice how thin I was.

### **The Opposite Sex?**

One of the boys in P.E. had started lifting weights, and one day in the locker room, he flexed his biceps for us. We all stood around and admired. At that moment I was aware of an attraction to him that seemed to go beyond the admiration that I thought the other boys felt. In my eyes, he was confident and admired; and I was his opposite. I believed if I were more like him, other boys would want to be my friends. I wanted to be confident and admired.

Now it is amazingly clear to me that the moment I first felt something like an erotic attraction to another guy was the very moment that I first identified myself as the emotional and physical opposite to that guy. Unknowingly, I was seeing myself as being the opposite sex from him. No wonder my psycho-sexual subconscious told me to be attracted to him and not to the girls with whom I identified!

Over time, I became more and more preoccupied with these longings to be like the more masculine boys as I watched them play sports and envied their abilities and their bodies. I would often sit in class and daydream about having the perfect body, pitching on a baseball team, and having a lot of male friends who admired me. I watched other boys and idolized the way they interacted together. In my mind I had a perfect picture of what a "cool guy" should be like was outgoing, popular, sports-oriented, good looking and physically developed - all the things I was not.

My daydreams became more and more sensual in nature, which led me to discover masturbation. The high of the orgasm rewarded and reinforced my same-sex preoccupation. Admiration combined with self-ridicule had turned to envy, and envy was now turned to lust.

### **Reconnecting to Masculinity**

Under the tutelage of a skilled reparative therapist, I found it wasn't too late to turn the pattern of my life around by correcting the gender insecurity and envy that had caused my lust for maleness to begin with. Determined not to spend the rest of my life running from masculine environments out of fear, I decided it was time to grow up and face my fears instead.

Little by little, I felt myself growing as a man. No longer sitting on the sidelines longing to be "one of the guys," I was becoming what I was attracted to in others.

It's not that learning to play sports or fix cars made me more heterosexual; that gross oversimplification is ludicrous. Rather, these were external methods to effect much-needed internal healing: facing my fear of activities and environments -- my fear of men, really -- that had so crippled me my whole life; internalizing deep feelings of finally feeling "man enough"; and dramatically increasing my sense of "gender esteem" and connection to the male world.

The road to healing was a difficult one filled with ups and downs. Along the way, I faced feelings of rejection from my peers and father. I worked to overcome feelings of inadequacy and incompetence as a man. As I worked with my counselor to fill my emotional needs, extinguish harmful behaviors, and heal emotional wounds, I noticed my homosexual compulsions becoming less intense. With time, they began to subside. Then, subtly, I noticed heterosexual feelings starting to emerge. These new feelings grew slowly as I continued progressing through the recovery process.

### **Marriage and Recommitment**

As heterosexual feelings began to take root, marriage seemed more of a reality. My circle of friends grew with my confidence and new skills. Dating and socializing became fun and exciting. It was at this point that a longstanding, close friendship with a girl named Kae -- a girl whom I had once "come out" to as a gay man -- became more intimate. I shared my breakthrough experiences in therapy with her, and we began dating with new inclinations. My new feelings drew me closer to her than I had felt in the past. Wanting our growing emotional intimacy also to become a physical one, I asked her to marry me. She said yes, and we were married in 1992.

Unfortunately, I became overconfident in many of the changes I had made in my life. Focused on my marriage and my busy new life as a newlywed, I let some of the things go that had been so integral to my healing: my new friendships with heterosexual men, sports activities, platonic heart-to-heart connections with men that had given me so much masculine affirmation. I had

abandoned the very things that had healed my masculine soul to begin with. And I soon paid the price.

A year into my marriage, I went down a road that resulted in me having sex with another man for the first time in my life. It felt so terrific in the moment -- and so devastating as soon as it was over. This was not what I wanted in my life! This was in direct opposition to everything I had worked for years.

Devastated at the pain and insecurity I had caused my new wife, and terrified of losing her, I "hit bottom" fast. I confessed to her and we went into marriage counseling. I sought and received spiritual counseling from my church. I got back into the friendship building and "guy time" that had been so healing before. I saw that I had approached those relationships and activities as a transient therapy, after which I would be "done" and could go back to my old self. No, I now realized, I needed to affect an actual personality transformation where constantly nourishing myself with masculinity, constantly participating with guys the way that most healthy straight guys do, is engrained in who I am.

I returned to those activities, and the internal transformation did take place. But I no longer consider myself "done" nourishing myself as a man, any more than I can ever be done nourishing myself with healthy food and drink. And as long as I have done this, homosexual lust has never again been a serious problem in my life.

### **People Can Change!**

All of this self-examination and therapy led me quite naturally to undergraduate and graduate degrees in psychology and counseling. Part of my work is in private practice, counseling other men who are seeking to understand and change unwanted homosexual desires, or men working to strengthen their masculine identities generally. I find it immensely satisfying.

I know from first-hand experience that CHANGE IS POSSIBLE! I never thought I would get married. I never thought I could find a woman I would be attracted to and could spend the rest of my life with. I never thought I would be freed from compulsive homosexual thoughts and feelings. I never thought I could step out on a sports field with heterosexual men and feel okay about myself.

Now I'm happily married with three terrific kids. I love my wife and my new orientation. Together, Kae and I have even written a book based in part on our experiences, called Homosexuality: Symptoms & Free Agency. That was a challenging but very bonding experience for us as a couple. I enjoy softball and basketball as hobbies that help me stay in shape and enjoy healthy physical activity with other men.

When I've read stories or seen TV reports from men who say they tried to change but were not able to, I am struck that according to their own accounts they just didn't seem to have any authentic "healing experiences" that could really be expected to effect deep internal change. They talk about learning to cross their legs correctly, pray and read scriptures. They talk about attempts at spiritual healing when they weren't spiritually broken to begin with; it was their confidence in themselves as men that was broken. It was their fear of heterosexual men that needs to be healed. CHANGE IS INDEED POSSIBLE for those who are willing to do the tough internal reconstruction on their emotional (not sexual or spiritual, usually) issues. I believe there are indeed thousands of us who have quietly done it.

Recovery has been more of a journey for me than an end result. It is clear that homosexuality was only the symptom of other underlying problems. As I resolved these other issues, I experienced a natural shift from homosexuality to heterosexuality. I was encouraged by men I met along the way who had gone before and showed me that it could be done. These men had implemented changes in their own lives that resulted in a shift of their sexual orientation. These men were standing on solid ground. Now I am too.

- Floyd Godfrey, 2000

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