

My Story Out of Homosexuality and into Heterosexuality,

By: Rich

In May 1997, I was in a complete state of crisis as I entered reparative therapy. My wife Marie had caught me in yet another lie that was supposed to cover up my double life. Surely, this would be the last straw. Surely, this time she would leave me and never come back, taking our children with her. I was completely panicked.

Entering the therapist's office for the first time caused me no particular discomfort; my panic over my marriage eclipsed any nervousness I might have had about what might happen in therapy. I had met my new therapist, David, just six weeks earlier through a self-help group for men who struggle with unwanted homosexual desires. He was the first man I ever met who reported that he had once dealt with homosexual longings himself but had resolved them.

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That gave me great confidence and hope. I had read the writings of people who made the generic claim that "others have come out of homosexuality, so you can too," but nothing I had read actually identified who these so called former homosexuals were, and for years I had doubted their existence. David was the first real live human being I had ever met who said, "I felt gay, and thought I wanted to live my life that way, but I found a way out that gave me more happiness and peace by healing than indulging." I didn't know what that meant, exactly, but I trusted that he, more than anyone else I had ever met, could help me find a way out of the pit I was in.

And a very deep pit it was. I was living a complete double life. I was a happy husband and father, church-goer and successful professional, but secretly addicted to homosexual encounters. After 14 years of this pattern, I had lost all hope, convinced that I was going to have to live this way the rest of my life, somehow hoping my two lives never collided and destroyed me.

Now, as I entered David's office, my hidden life was in fact on a direct collision course with my false front. I could see my life about to fall down around me. Suicide was becoming an increasingly appealing option.

The APA's Disclaimer: This Won't Work and Might Hurt

The first order of business on my first visit with David was for me to sign a release form from the American Psychological Association: Reparative therapy was unproven, the form said; the APA's official stance was that it didn't believe it was possible to change sexual orientation; attempting to do so might even cause psychological harm.

Yeah, right, I thought, as if the double life I was living was not causing psychological harm enough.

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Too, I resented the suggestion that the only "correct" solution (politically correct, anyway) for me was to abandon my wife and children and throw myself into a gay life. That was not what I wanted. I had had the chance to do that before I met Marie and had children with her, when the stakes were much lower -- and I realized then that that was not what I wanted. While dating men, adopting a gay identity, and throwing myself into a gay life had been exhilarating at first, it had soon felt like it was killing my spirit, alienating myself from my goals in life, from God and a sense of higher purpose. I had realized then that I didn't want to be affirmed as gay; I wanted to be affirmed as a man.

In our first session, I blurted out the whole story with a frankness and abandon that was unprecedented for me. David was safe to tell. I didn't have to worry about seeking his approval or about there being any consequences in my life for divulging my story to him. He responded with candor: "Your life is a mess." I was surprised at his bluntness, but knew it to be true. "I can help you work through the immediate crisis," he said, "but unless you go a whole lot deeper than that, you'll just go back out there and delay the inevitable recurrence -- probably with even greater consequences next time."

I agreed. I had hit bottom. I was ready to do whatever it took to salvage the mess of my life. Over the next several weeks, I practically ran to David's office each Tuesday evening, finding a place of safety and solace where I could get help and guidance with the darkest secrets of my life. I grieved with him over the intense pain I had caused Marie and her very legitimate hurt and rage at me. How relieved I was that, seeing my resolve and with hope in the new resources I was finding, she decided not to leave -- at least not yet.

Uncovering the Wounds

In therapy, David and I explored a lifetime of perceived rejection from men. In successive therapy sessions, I cried and I raged. To my amazement, David encouraged the full expression of this anger in my sessions with him. But I wanted to freeze up instead, paralyzed with fear and shame. Wasn't anger bad? I thought. Wasn't it out of control? Good boys don't get mad. And worst of all, what might I uncover just underneath the paralysis? But David taught me it was this hidden anger and shame, in part, that I was turning on myself self-destructively and that was driving me to act out sexually. The anger needed to be expressed legitimately. It needed to be honored.

And so the anger spilled out of me: anger at my father for being emotionally checked out of my life; rage at Mike the Bully for his constant ridicule of me in high school; rage at my mother for shaming me over my maleness; hurt that I had been carrying around inside of me my whole life, where it could continue to attack me from within. With David coaching me, I visualized fighting back, ejecting the taunts, shame and rejection from my heart, and then destroying them. Over the months we repeated this process, until at last I could find no more anger stirring within me. At last, having emptied a lifetime of pent-up anger from my wounded soul, I was ready to release and forgive.

At other times, David worked with me on my addictive cycles. We explored in depth what seemed to trigger my "acting out" -- stress, anger, fear, almost any uncomfortable emotion caused me to try to seek solace in the drug-like rush of forbidden sexual stimulation. I determined to return to Sexaholics Anonymous, where I had once started to make progress toward breaking my addictive cycles. As I did, and as I processed my emotional life in depth with David each week, the cycles first slowed and then tapered off dramatically.

Entering the World of Men

David taught me about defensive detachment, and I saw how I had defensively rejected men in order to protect myself from being hurt by them. I pored over a book by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, "Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality," and was amazed to find my exact psychological profile, it seemed, complete with defensive detachment, described in his book.

David helped me open my mind and heart to the possibility of finding heterosexual men whom I could turn to for help and support throughout my week. It was terrifying, but I approached Martin, a man at my church about eight years older than I, and asked him to be a spiritual mentor to me. He readily agreed. He knew nothing about homosexuality, but he knew about God, and he knew about pain, and he was more than willing to be there for me. I talked with him at least weekly, sometimes several times a week, baring my soul. I called him when I was tempted to act out. I called him when I stumbled, and he helped lift me back up.

David's joy for me in my newfound friendship was palpable. "I wish I could meet him!" he said. "Heck, I wish I could clone him for my other clients!"

This was something I had come to love about David -- for all his unvarnished candor about my mistakes and self-destructive blunders, I felt his authentic joy in my successes and growth. I was truly coming to love this man as a brother in a way I had never loved a brother in my life.

Still, there were plenty of times I froze in fear at the prospect of reaching out to other men in friendship. I was convinced that heterosexual men didn't have friends -- didn't even need friends. Their wives or girlfriends were supposed to be enough for them. Certainly, my father never had any friends, and never went anywhere socially without my mother. I could only remember one

friend that my three much-older brothers had between them. How could I rely on heterosexual men to be there for me, to be my friends, to meet my needs for male companionship and affirmation? I had always believed the only men who wanted anything to do with other men were gay.

David challenged me to open my eyes, to look beyond my engrained perceptions. "Your soul demands male connection, and that desire WILL express itself, one way or another. It WILL come out. Suppressing it will only work for a short while, and then the dam will burst. If you don't experience authentic, intimate male connection platonically, the need will absolutely drive you to find it sexually. One way or another, the need will be met."

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The words resonated within me: One way or another, the need will be met. I knew it was true for me. I pushed myself to reach out of my shell. I started observing heterosexual men more. I started to notice men going out to eat together, going to the movies together, going to men's groups, working on cars together. At parties, I noticed the men cluster in groups separate from the women within moments of arriving. They hung out together watching a game on TV as they talked, or playing pool, or some other activity.

I was discovering the world of men as if for the first time. I would come into a therapy session with David and share my discoveries with him as I sought to understand and demystify the world of men. We talked about the things that men do, how they are at parties, how they are with each other and with women. I started to understand them, then appreciate them -- then, a bit at a time, to feel that I wasn't so different from them.

One of my most frightening steps was to ask a man from my church, Richard, to teach me to play basketball. David didn't suggest this to me, but the fear I had around sports was nothing short of phobic, and something inside of me demanded that I face this fear. It was hard enough to approach Richard and ask him to teach me, but to actually show up at the basketball court for my first lesson was even more frightening. I was actually more embarrassed about my ineptness around sports than I was about my homosexual past. So I was making myself completely vulnerable to Richard by revealing to him that I didn't know the first thing about basketball.

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Richard coached me every Saturday morning for several weeks, and I reported my successes and fears back to David. Finally, I joined Richard for a few pick-up basketball games. The first time was truly traumatic; all the taunts of school bullies came rushing back. But the next week was better, and the next. One time, I e-mailed David with pride: "I can do a jump shot! For the first

time in my life, I did a jump shot!" He e-mailed back that he was thrilled for me, and he could relate. Who else could have understood the significance of that for a 36-year-old man?

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I was a man among men.

As we continued to work together, David told me about a men's organization called New Warriors that did intensive weekend "initiation" training for men at a mountain camp two hours away. I was hesitant the first couple of times he mentioned it, but as my fear of men dissipated, I resolved to go. I practically floated into his office my first session after returning from the weekend in August of 1998. "It was awesome!" I reported. "I discovered MEN!" I was like them; they were like me! I was a man among men. The realization sank into me as never before.

There were more ups and downs, slips and falls, courage and fear, but now I had many sources of strength -- David, Martin, Richard, a weekly New Warriors "integration group" in my community, Sexaholics Anonymous and, always, Marie. She stood by me, loved me and encouraged me as she saw real changes in my heart, not just my behavior.

My Own Man

In the last few months of my therapy with David, sensing that my need for professional therapy was coming to an end, I took greater command of the sessions to make sure I dealt with everything I needed his help with: lingering feelings of rejection I needed to release; hurts I needed to forgive. More and more, I was coming in to therapy sessions reporting joy instead of hurt, anger or fear, sharing my increased sense of identity and power as a man, reporting on new friendships I was building and new risks I was taking to test my increased inner strength.

As we prepared to part ways, one time David said these wonderful words, "You ARE a man," I heard his strong, deep voice affirming. "You are strong. You are powerful. You have broken the power that once tied you to your mother's identity. You have proven yourself as a man among men. Men admire you and affirm you. You are one of them. You are a good and loving husband and father. You are whole. Not perfect, but you're okay not being perfect. You are whole."

Tears rolled down my face. I believed him! It was true, and I finally knew it. I was whole! I no longer desired men sexually. I was one of them, not their opposite. I didn't need a man to complete me. Yet the irony is, I felt more bonded and connected to men and manhood than I had all of my life. THIS is what I had been seeking all those years from all those men. THIS is what I had really wanted all along -- this REAL connection, not the fantasy one. Connection to God. Connection to men. Connection to my own manhood. Wholeness within myself. I felt my heart almost burst out of my chest with joy.

I walked out of David's office for the last time on August 25, 1999, 27 months after I had first walked in. I was a different man. Stronger. Happier. More grounded. Whole. I had been "sexually sober" and faithful to my wife for two years -- and had found peace and joy in doing so.

As I left the last session, I hugged David firmly. "I love you," I told him. "I'll never forget what you've done for me." With tears in his eyes, he said, "I love you too." I would take the gifts David had given me with me into every other relationship from now on. I didn't need David as a therapist anymore, because now I could be in honest relationships with others. I could make friends. I could ask for help. I could be real.

And more than anything else, I could love. I had learned to give love and receive love from other men as my brothers, and trust them with my heart. In this, I truly had found what I had been looking for all my life.

Post Script

My marriage to Marie improved dramatically. We both fell more deeply in love than ever. We continued to go through personal trials and struggles together, though, especially as she was (re)diagnosed with breast cancer in 2000. She died in late 2006, after 18 years of marriage. I was so grateful that throughout the second half of our marriage I was able to be the faithful husband to her that she always deserved. I will be eternally grateful to this beautiful woman who stood by me and believed in me and supported me, and who in so many ways helped me become the man I am today.