

## II. COMING OUT

### One Woman Tells Her Story

So perhaps there is hope for some kind of a decent life, once the fallout from the Nuclear Family Meltdown settles. But if you've read this far and are starting to picture yourself in these roles, the question you now want most to ask is: "What of my wife? How will she take it; what will she do?" The following is one wife's story.

#### **Joan's Story**

I am the wife of a gay man. Now separated, we were married for nine years. My husband, Terry, came out to me a year before we separated. When he first told me, he said that he was bisexual. I, of course, was shocked. Our relationship had been very good. We shared a lot of common interests and we were very good friends. Our sex life was very satisfying to me.

After the initial coming out I was faced with coping with Terry's sexuality and its effects on our relationship. Homosexuality generally, was no problem for me. I had long ago accepted and understood it to be as natural as heterosexuality. Terry and I had read and discussed a lot about homosexuality. For Terry's part this was a way of feeling me out in preparation for his "coming out."

After the first shock, we both felt our lives would go on pretty much the same with some alterations. As time went by, Terry admitted to being homosexual. We were unaware of the implications involved. As Terry was finding that he needed more time to be with gay people, I found I was posing questions which seemed to be a step ahead of where Terry was at the time. I began to resent his time away and his growing psychological distance from me. We were both torn apart inside. Terry was feeling a sense of joy and rebirth because he was now beginning to live as the person he truly was. On the other hand, he was feeling guilt and sadness because he knew I was hurting and he didn't want to lose the love we had. I felt resentful and at the same time wanted him to at last be free to live as his sexuality dictated.

We spent many evenings reading and discussing the lives of other gay people and in particular those in a heterosexual marriage. We thought perhaps an open marriage could work. As I had no desire to pursue any other relationship, I didn't exercise my option. I didn't become blasé about Terry's sexual involvement but my main concern was the possibility of an emotional involvement. I had to do a lot of self-analysis to see what I wanted for myself in life and what would be fair to both of us. Although it took both of us a long time to speak our thoughts, we knew we must separate. Terry could no longer compromise his life and live with dignity. I could not be involved in a relationship in which my needs could not be met completely. The emotional tension was getting unbearable. The thought of separating when there was so much love seemed almost impossible to deal with. At different times we both reached such a state of depression that we felt suicidal. For me it was the thought of our son that made me realize I couldn't take the easy way out. We reached a point where we were emotionally drained and our thoughts had to turn to the future and to a changed relationship. I got a job and made preparations for moving. It was my choice to move out, as I had neither the time nor the energy to maintain a house.

During the year that passed, our families and friends were totally unaware of what we were going-through. We had to cope ourselves, without interference. We knew it would be very difficult telling those we loved. Our families, when told, were very shocked and concerned, but over time came to a degree of understanding and were very supportive. Our friends reacted in much the same way. The comforting aspect was that they knew Terry was the same person he had always been and now they knew him completely. There was definitely more of an effort on the part of the women than the men to understand and learn.

The period of time right after the separation wasn't as traumatic as I thought it would be. I was busy with practical matters and didn't mind living alone. We shared the parenting and Dean's time with each of us was based on our work schedules. Dean was going to nursery school. We tried to present a positive situation for Dean with regard to his living arrangement. He had times, and still does, when he is upset and confused. We are very much aware that he is making comparisons with other families. He seems secure in his parents' love for him and each other. My hope is that society will begin to accommodate children like Dean and recognize that the concept of "family" is based on the positive, loving feelings among its members and not solely determined by the fact that mother, father, child live under the same roof. Dean has adjusted very, very well.

After I settled into my apartment I began to experience times when I felt I was regressing emotionally. My love for Terry had not changed. I felt frustrated because I needed more from him than loving affection. I had to redirect those feelings but found I was turned off by the straight men I had met. My feminist attitudes and the friendships I enjoyed with gay men contributed to my reaction to straight men. It wasn't until I met another wife whose husband was gay that I began to make progress emotionally. I began to gain strength because this woman, whose husband had just come out to her, needed me — if only to listen and know I understood completely.

I am now beginning to experience inner happiness. The relationship I have with Terry is loving and without anxiety. I will always be supportive of Terry and gay people. My experience has so affected my life that I know I will have to deal with anti-gay attitudes as best I can, while finding happiness as a single straight woman.

I have a moral obligation to share my experience and what I have learned in hopes that others can avoid a situation which causes a lot of emotional pain. There is always a tendency to place blame somewhere for an unhappy situation. I feel societal attitudes have forced gay people to suppress their sexuality and develop emotional relationships with the opposite sex than can never be fully satisfying.

My son will grow up knowing that his father is gay and knowing gay people. He will have to deal with his peers, but he will not be confused by all the misconceptions. His sexuality is now established. If he is straight, hopefully because of his exposure to gay people he will accept sexual variation as healthy and good. If he is gay, he will not feel alone and self-loathing. He will have a role model which society denied his father.

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