



III. RE-ESTABLISHING YOUR LIFE

Once a married gay man has come out to himself and accepts his homosexuality, some very basic questions have to be answered. Will the marriage continue, especially after a gay man has come out to his wife? The answer to this and other related questions depends on several factors.

First, a gay father may decide not to come out to his wife at all, but having accepted his homosexuality will continue having anonymous tearoom sex or perhaps may frequent gay bars or baths without his wife ever suspecting anything. He may even know another gay married man with whom he has a sexual relationship. Most gay men in this situation eventually find they cannot tolerate this narrow, restricted way of expressing their homosexuality and wish to be honest with their wife. Thus, as is often the case today, many gay men are coming out to their wives and experiencing that great sense of relief at no longer having to hide their secret.

With the lifting of this burden a sense of euphoria may set in and a concomitant desire to expand one's contacts in the gay world on a more social level. It should be noted at this point that many gay men knowing they are gay, still get married for various reasons, such as a cover for their homosexuality, or the desire to have children, and have a secret gay social as well as sexual life all

through their marriage. The gay man who accepts his homosexuality only after getting married begins to take more and more time out of his marriage to be with other gay people. The sense of being with one's own people makes the heterosexual relationship seem more and more distant.

It is at this point that some of the terrible pain may begin. The more the gay man and his wife love each other and their children, the more difficult the decisions become. Can the gay husband restrict his gay involvement to a night or two out with gay friends, even if his wife is understanding and willing to let him? It is most likely, as experience has shown, that the wife will begin showing resentment and jealousy when her husband is out on his allotted "gay nights." Even a wife who has learned much about gay people and who truly understands is not going to be any more free from jealousy than one who remains totally ignorant of homosexuality.

Both partners may want to try to make accommodations and may want to stay together. If they love each other, what could be more natural than wanting to carry on with the relationship? A few nights per week may seem sufficient time to be with other gay people, but this only helps the gay person realize where he truly belongs and the two nights per week will begin to seem like a restriction.

What is happening to the gay man in this and similar situations is a restructuring of his life. It can take several paths and go at varying speeds, but a new person and lifestyle is forming. Many men, of course, may not be given a prolonged period of time to make these changes gradually. A wife may be very hostile and want immediate separation in which case the separated husband will be making many adjustments all at the same time. He may move out and live alone, or his wife may leave with the kids. Essentially he is now living as a bachelor, but with the financial and emotional responsibilities of a father.

Another factor which may hasten the separation is the one where the gay husband meets a lover. The wife, more often than not, will begin to notice a withdrawal of attention. She may ask her husband if he is depressed about something. The pressure of trying to share affection with two people may bring a man to come out to his wife and a decision on his part to let his life take a new direction.

It is rare that an openly gay man and his wife stay together. It does happen on occasion; Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester are a case in point, although their marriage was still fraught with some emotional difficulties. Each of us has a different personality and each gay husband and his wife, within their own perception of the future, will determine where the gay person's life is going.

Staying in a marriage is always going to make both partners live with compromises. If those compromises restrict neither the continued success of the marriage nor the healthy development of the gay spouse as an openly gay person, then perhaps the marriage may work. However, whether the marriage continues or the husband and wife go their separate ways, the gay man may find his circle of friends and acquaintances expanding substantially and an increased feeling of confidence and Tightness about his sexuality.

These changes in a person — the new confidence, the increased amount of psychic energy now available for things other than pretending to be heterosexual — will provide the tools for creating that new life as an openly gay man, even if being open is restricted to family and gay friends. The degree that the gay man is going to be open about his homosexuality will determine how he is going to restructure his life. If one's family is told, their reaction will decide how the family relationship will proceed. If most reject their gay relative then a severe break in the previously established pattern of family interaction will occur. Again the reaction of straight friends will determine whether the old social patterns will remain or not. Simply stated, the number of straight

people who accept the gay man and the degree to which they accept him will determine to what degree the old life will be a part of the new.

An important and sometimes difficult matter in separation and divorce is the question of money. In Ontario, the Family Law Reform Act requires that "family assets" be divided equally between husband and wife and that child custody and visiting rights be established "in the best interests of the child." Most other provinces and states have similar legislation. The principles of these laws set helpful and fair guidelines, but they do not resolve all questions. In law, children are a responsibility of both parents and this principle too should be seen in decisions that fix who is to pay what to whom. How much should you share with your wife in support payments? No firm rule exists to determine a figure, but it should be recalled that women's earning power is often less than men's. Usually a woman will find employment after a separation if she does not already have a paying job and this may help to increase her sense of independence and self-esteem. The father's job too serves as an anchor for him in a period of disorientation, particularly if he can find a colleague he can confide in and to whom he can explain the symptoms of distress that may now be spilling over into his work.

In one example from our group, the separated parents decided to share time with their child during equal periods each month. Neither parent pays child support to the other. Instead, they live on their own incomes, but share the child's medical expenses and such costs as clothing and nursery school equally between them.

There are as many ways to restructure your life as there are gay fathers, and each father will have a variety of options open as well as roadblocks that need to be, and can be, overcome. It is important to read about gay people. The number of books and newspapers available by and about gay men and women is now growing fast — so read! You may also find it helpful to become involved with a local gay group — either one that is working for gay rights, or one that is predominantly social in nature. It is one way of meeting other gay people and one that is free of harassment by non-gays and will allow you to come out at your own speed. If a gay fathers' or gay married men's group is within reach then it would be a good idea to contact them so that you will have someone with similar experiences to talk to. They will let you socialize with gay people while remaining as anonymous as you feel you want to be.

It is a different but not uncommon circumstance where the gay father finds himself in a marriage that has deteriorated, not because the husband and father is gay, but simply because the marriage is not working. The personalities and goals of the partners are, or become, too divergent. Most often this gay man is not out to his wife but acknowledges his gay identity and lives as a gay person after the separation or divorce. If a reasonable settlement is achieved at separation, i.e., child custody, division of family equity, child support payments, the gay man is often afraid that acknowledgement of his gayness by his former wife may jeopardize what child custody he has. Children can be used as a weapon and no one comes out the winner. The gay father who comes out after the fact of separation must weigh the benefits and losses of coming out to his wife. His wife's feelings and knowledge about homosexuality and the degree that the gay man wishes to be out and involved in the gay community will be important factors. In the final analysis, the individual must decide what he feels is the best step to take.

Are You In Danger If You Come Out?

Over recent years, an increasing number of people have come to recognize that many minorities and disadvantaged groups live under conditions of injustice and inequity. This awareness has also grown among those who suffer discrimination and disadvantage. So it is that women, native peoples, linguistic and ethnic minorities, the disabled, and, of course, gays have come to ask for their rights as human beings; they ask to be allowed to exist without oppression and self-hatred. In Canada many provincial governments have now moved to guarantee the liberty and dignity of individuals by enacting human rights codes and by creating commissions to enforce them. The federal government has established a similar code and commission and proposes as well to enact a Charter of Rights when it patriates and revises the Canadian constitution. With the single exception of Quebec, neither the provinces nor the federal government give protection to gays in their human rights legislation. This lack of recognition serves to continue society's misunderstanding and persecution of gays. People fired from their jobs or denied housing because they are gay have no recourse through law. And so the growing flow of hate literature against gays can continue unchecked, although this literature would be illegal if it were directed against any of the other groups protected by human rights legislation.

The federal government has revised the Criminal Code to limit its provisions that make homosexual acts illegal. In 1967, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the present Prime Minister of Canada, was Minister of Justice. In a phrase that expressed the spirit of the times and gained widespread recognition and acceptance, he declared that "the State has no place in the bedrooms of the nation." And then he introduced legislation to make homosexual acts legal *in some circumstances*. It is important to note what these circumstances are. The government did not repeal the section of the Criminal Code that makes homosexual acts illegal; it simply added other sections to say that homosexual acts would be no longer be illegal if they were performed between consenting adults in private. It is now becoming clear that this way of making homosexuality legal means that the State still has a place in rooms other than the bedroom, and maybe even there too if homo- rather than heterosexual acts are occurring in them.

Recent events have made it clear that the 1967 revision of the Criminal Code did not make gay sex legal; it simply said that sometimes it was not illegal. The difference is important, as more than 300 men know who were arrested during the raids on four Toronto bathhouses on February 5, 1981.¹ These raids were launched under provisions of the Criminal Code that define *any place* as a common bawdy house if prostitution or "acts of indecency" are committed there. Are homosexual acts indecent? The courts are now considering that question and they have before them a long history of precedents to say they are, although these precedents are balanced by a few modern decisions to the contrary. The courts may also be influenced by the current virulent attacks against homosexuals, aimed especially at the gay liberation movement, that come from frightened or opportunistic politicians, from the police, and from the self-proclaimed moral majority that, in the style of the Ministry of Truth, calls itself in Canada the "moderate majority."

¹ The sixty men arrested recently in a police raid on an Edmonton bath have the same painful knowledge. It is said the Edmonton police consulted with Toronto police, so they could do an even better raid than the big city cops. And they did — one that was even more humiliating, arbitrary, and destructive to those trapped in it.

If homosexual acts are themselves indecent, then even the bedrooms of the nation become common bawdy houses if gay sex goes on in them. It is this "Catch 22" that gives the police the grounds to raid the baths — and for that matter to charge people in their own homes — for no matter how private the setting, nor what the age of the consenting partners, their acts may be regarded as "indecent" (i.e., homosexual) and subject to penalty under the Criminal Code.

So even today, gays can find good reason to remain hidden and to do little to help themselves. Unlike individuals in cultural or racial minorities, the gay person experiences a large part of life as an isolated human being. He or she cannot readily see anyone among family or friends to turn to for comfort and support. If others call you "nigger," "wop," or "paki," you at least know someone else close and dear to you who bears the same label. We do not underestimate the pain these labels give those they are pinned on, nor do we condone the action of those who do the pinning. Some of us bear these labels too and know a double alienation. But what do you do if they call you "queer" or "faggot"? And worse, what do you do if you call yourself that? Unlike other targets of discrimination, gays can go unnoticed. They can pass for straight and so they themselves become a potent force in their own oppression. If you are gay, you can hide in full view of everyone, even yourself. You may even show a little homophobia (or a lot of it) to hide your gayness from others and from yourself.

Some gays were always able to accept their homosexuality even before the current gay liberation movement helped masses of others to come out of the closet. Some people may hide their gayness from everyone except a small circle of friends, but at least they are out to themselves.

In this book, however, we address those men who may not *want* to accept their homosexuality. We speak also to those men who do not yet recognize what their fears, fantasies, and compelling urges mean. And We speak also to those men who know what is different about their sexuality, but who are unsure how to cope with the problems it brings within the family. Such men are gays who denied their sexuality long enough to get married and father children. If this has happened to you and you are now awakening to who you are and what you have done, we want to talk to you and say many things.

The first is: *You are not alone*. Others have been in your shoes, faced the crisis, and lived through it to become happier and better people — people who are more honest with themselves and with others. They recognize that there are no easy or pat answers to the problems they face, but they are convinced that it is possible to face them, live through them, and build a better way of living for themselves and for those they love.

Coming out to yourself is a struggle each person goes through alone. Perhaps a positive newspaper article about gays or an interview on television with a gay person who seems to have life by the tail is the spark that starts the fire. The implanting of this first healthy gay image is, of course, unplanned by you, since you could never bring yourself to think of homosexuality and yourself in positive terms. Yet that first active, healthy gay role model may have forced you to think and perhaps now you want to know more about it. You may cautiously approach the public library and read a few chapters in some of the increasingly numerous and helpful books about homosexuality. Some of them may even be written by gays for gays. You may not yet be ready to go through the ordeal of taking a book to a librarian and checking it out, but at least you are now more aware that there are other gay people who are fully human and who are probably not much different from you.

Secondly, we want to say that you may be ready now to start learning and changing. Perhaps one of the sympathetic portrayals of gays in novels, plays, or the popular media penetrates your consciousness and you begin to understand and accept what is being said. You are then beginning to come out and you know you can't help it, although the path ahead looks impossible, but you desperately want to avoid hurting those you love, those to whom you gave commitments. So you worry. But once you begin to come out to yourself, how can you go back? You can't believe you would

see in yourself what you now see. You can't believe you could ever find yourself in this position, but there you are. The worry doesn't help, but it won't go away and you may find yourself feeling desperate and deeply depressed. How often have you contemplated suicide or drunk too much and too often? These are attempts to escape what you know is true and to avoid problems that appear insoluble.

Whose fault is all of this? In the midst of loved ones, you are lonely and unhappy, and you begin to see that the source of this stress is not your gayness but society's attitudes to it. Many gays who go through this internal struggle become angry about the wasted years, the deceit and the hiding. This anger can be healthy, so use it positively. You may cry a lot, but a sense of relief comes as you experience the real self, the self without the pretence and the oppression. Go ahead and cry. You owe it to yourself, and you are no less of a man or a human being for letting out feelings that have been too long pent up. There is a rage that builds against the long years of oppression and it will out, it will be expressed. Go ahead and cry and then do something about the oppression that you have for so long accepted. Make plans to do something different. Do one thing at a time, but do something. Or, are you happy to leave things as they are? If so, you should probably put this book down, although you may want to take it up again. Looking at your present state of affairs honestly and fully may give you the incentive and the courage to go on, to take at least one small step to change your situation and make it better.

If you do nothing else, you can at least continue reading. The suggested readings at the end of the book will help you to know more about yourself and other gay people. It is important to come out to yourself and to understand your gayness before you can successfully come out to other people, particularly to your wife and children. If you are married and have children, a new and frightening dilemma poses itself. Do you come out to your wife and children, and if so, what does the future hold for you?

Through it all remember that homosexuality is natural. The homosexual lifestyle can be a loving and rewarding experience if we make it so. The problem is how to combine it with our roles as husbands and fathers. There is no easy answer to this problem. Those of us who write this book can only say we have found a variety of answers to it. Sometimes these answers are found within the intact structure of the family. More often they are found outside of it. Whatever the answers we have found and however painful they were to reach, we believe our circumstances to be better than those in which we carried on as though nothing were wrong and in which we solved the problem by denying that it existed. In all the answers we seek, we know that it is not just our own happiness we must consider. When all those involved are able to understand and accept what has happened, the possibility of working out new and more satisfying family structures is greatly increased. The making of the new structure sometimes comes only with bitterness and recrimination, with struggles over children and financial resources. Other times it comes with sadness and regret, but with continuing love, respect and support. It is this latter kind of rebuilding that we should aim for, but some new structures must come, even through pain. Once the father begins to come out, he finds it difficult if not impossible to go back. He may hesitate, he may stop; but then he realizes he is not alone and he goes forward again.

The following stories by a gay father and his lover illustrate some of the stress and release that go with the transition to the new life.

It's Time You Found a Nice Man and Settled Down: Joel's Story

It is difficult to say when I came out. Was it my first sexual encounter at sixteen in the YMCA, or was it the time many years later when a straight friend blurted out "It's time you found a nice man and settled down." To me it was the latter occasion because I realized that she knew me better than I knew myself.

For many years I had silently experimented, had liaisons — short-lived with several men and one long-lasting, successful relationship with a woman. The relationship with the woman left me feeling more fulfilled than the short-lived liaisons with the men. To this day my oldest and most loyal friends are female.

I thought I had successfully separated my social life from my business life and my sexual existence from the other two. In many ways I felt that I was going in three different directions. This hidden searching, this fear of revealing myself completely, has not fully left me.

Although I had several lovers, I was still very much in the closet. As much as possible, without attracting attention, I looked for books and materials dealing with homosexuality. I even smuggled back "skin" books from New York — books I had never even seen in Toronto.

My life was becoming very isolated, and any company I kept was within a very small group of people, most of whom came from a refugee or Israeli background. At this point in time I was virtually celibate.

When told "It's time you found a nice man and settled down," my instant reaction was denial. But what was there to deny? It was true. I accepted the challenge of what I was, of what I am now, and of what I always will be. This acceptance made me want to come out to some people from whom I had previously hidden the person I was.

Up until that point I had never gone to a gay bar or dance hall or to the baths. I had heard about such places, and had even heard rumours as to where they were. Now for the first time I went to some of the bars and dances, but not to the baths — that would have been going too far. Even going to the places I did was a startling experience. This was a new game and I didn't know the rules. The places and the experiences were interesting, but not satisfying. Was this gay? My comfort was in the support of a couple of friends whose strong belief in themselves and others helped me to find my own identity. It was at this point that I heard of George Hislop and CHAT. I hoped I would discover more — much more.

I made an appointment with George and subsequently became heavily involved with committee work and other activities. To my great delight I discovered some interesting and fun people who had a broader outlook on life than is found in the bars and baths.

It was now the time to "come out." I told the people who were closest to me that I was gay — those to whom I felt I had a commitment, a commitment based on friendship. Most continued to accept me, a few withdrew. Most had already suspected that I was gay and were pleased that I could talk to them about it. All the same I felt that I should be discreet and never really expose them to a homosexual situation. Several years went by during which time I had some brief encounters, and some not so brief. I consequently gained some sense of self as well as the idea that I might go through life in much the same manner as the partners with whom I was having affairs. I decided I had to go along with what others did as couples. I travelled, socialized, went out to dinner, and even became a property owner. Even so, there were still some pretty low times.

At the time I met the person who has now been my lover for seven years, I was feeling down, and at first I didn't want to get involved. Well, it took a week for me to decide this was the man I wanted and

needed. I felt so confident that I introduced him to my friends. Most of them have since disappeared into the woodwork, including the person who gave me the challenge in the first place. I was acceptable only as a token gay in their straight society, but adding one to make us a couple was unacceptable. Several of our friends did accept us; they congratulated us and have remained as friends, supportive and loving.

The circle of our friends is still small, but growing. The opportunity today to be oneself and to express affection, as a whole person, is worth the trials, pain, and isolation experienced in getting there.

A Gay Father Readjusts: Derek's Story

I do not remember when I actually knew I was a confirmed homosexual, but I'm sure that I was reasonably young (ten to twelve years of age). The male physique had always excited me for as far back as I can recall. I was able to get an erection just from looking at a reasonably well-built man who was shirtless or in tight shorts or, of course, naked. Whereas well-developed women were always beautiful to behold, they never aroused me. Since I was quite young, I'm sure that the realization that I was gay was not yet at the conscious level. I was too naive and innocent. I didn't know, for example, what people with these kinds of feelings were called. I just instinctively knew that I was different and that my difference was somehow not socially acceptable (my maternal grandmother periodically made derogatory comments about my behaviour that reinforced my awareness that I was atypical). I desperately wanted to express these feelings — to tell someone what I was feeling — but there was no one with whom I could talk, nor had I reached the point where I could have articulated very clearly the nature of the feelings which were running wildly through my head. Frustration was pervasive. It loomed over me like a dark, ominous, and certainly very oppressive cloud. Loneliness was all I knew.

My interpersonal relationships were few and primarily unsuccessful. I retreated and became a loner. I tried to exercise what few heterosexual feelings I had. I made a feeble attempt at dating and during my adolescent years I tried to prove to myself that I, too, was capable of such socially-acceptable behaviour. I failed. My self-concept, never being very good to begin with because of lack of parental empathy and support during my formative years, deteriorated even further. I began to compensate for this by becoming the buffoon, the class clown, as well as acquiring a certain degree of bravado. My peers were experiencing life, whereas my life was a charade. I began to read extensively as a means of escaping my situation. I used to watch television and would become completely absorbed in whatever happened to be on. The situations being depicted appeared to offer another means of escape. I periodically fell in love with an actor who was particularly attractive. I fantasized.

Eventually at age seventeen I left, for good, the small, inconspicuous town in northern California where I was born and raised and moved to San Francisco to pursue a college degree. San Francisco became my Mecca. I acted like a wild animal released from captivity. I blossomed. I had more homosexual encounters, although not as many as I wanted to have or as I might have had if I had been more self-confident and assertive. Nevertheless I sensed that my horizons were expanding at last and indeed they were.

I never actually came out to my wife prior to our separating and subsequently divorcing. Our marital breakup was primarily due to other, unrelated factors. Like many homosexuals, I think I could have masked my sexual persuasion and when circumstances permitted, had the occasional liaison. However unsatisfactory this arrangement might have been, I'm sure I would have tried to make it work since that was the way I had been programmed: heterosexuality was good; homosexuality was bad.

The Fates, however, didn't give me an opportunity to decide which course of action to take. Once my wife embarked on her own career, our child and I were alone. Never deliberately seeking to be alone, I immediately began to pursue the sexual drives that had been more or less lying dormant. The more homosexual contact I had (and I didn't have that many), the more convinced I became that I could never deny who or what I was. There was no turning back. I decided that my life was not going to be a charade any longer.

When circumstances permitted, I told all of my friends — all of whom were straight. Their reaction was, "So what?" Since then many of these so-called friends have ceased to play an active

part in my life. The heterosexual social world gradually began to assume less and less importance, while the previously restricted homosexual social world began to assume an increasingly greater role. I was finally able to express my total being in an environment that was supportive, sympathetic, and understanding, although I must acknowledge that there was (and still are) aspects of the gay world which I have found unacceptable, if not totally reprehensible. My move away from the heterosexual social world was done with some regret. I had enjoyed many good times with these people, even though a significant part of me was being denied expression. (I had successfully learned to sublimate.)

I'm still not out of the closet at work, at least not explicitly. I doubt if I ever will be. The organization for which I work is too conservative to accommodate such unconventionality. Being partially free (in my social life), however, is certainly better than not being free at all. Maybe in time I'll have the courage to go all the way. Who knows? In the meantime, there is a duality about my persona that only the perceptive apparently see. An unwritten rule prevails, however; I don't tell and they don't ask. We simply continue to coexist.