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just out^h

Role models

In elementary school, my idol was Jo, the butchy girl with the motorcycle, on The Facts of Life

BY JULIE L. BAUMIER

I have lived a pretty sheltered life. My mother, whether she will admit it or not, tried to raise my sister and me as she was raised. As a result, I know which fork to use (or at least how to fake it), when it is permissible to bring out your summer clothes (yes, there is a set day), and how to ballroom dance (not that I ever use any of these skills). I've spent my entire life hearing what a proper young lady does and does not do. My mother hoped covertly that, like her, my sister and I would make our debut — or at least want to. My sister spent a short time wanting to.

I came out. Fortunately for me, and unfortunately for my mother, I came out as a lesbian not as an item on the marriage market.

How did I make the transformation from what my mother wanted for me to be and who I am today? There were two major elements. First, my father did not come from the same kind of background that my mother did: he thought that independence and competence were more important than knowing which fork to use.

Second, I had role models. Some gay, some straight, some I don't know. Some of these people literally just walked through my life (like my unmarried aunt). All of them have shown me alternatives to the little "grow-up-get-married-to-a-man-have-kids-maybe-have-a-job-live-happily-ever-after scenario" that school, books, television movies, and my parents were feeding me.

Even though I grew up in a neighborhood that consisted of all the "nines" — the leftovers from when the one-in-ten's (who are gay) have gone to a more liberal part of town — I still managed to find role models, although I didn't necessarily know that is what they were at the time. For example, all my life I've heard stories about the lives of various unmarried female relatives. Another role model was the very butchy, very cute, dyke grocery store checker. (and, yes, I admit that I still have a crush on her, but she was a role model as well). In elementary school, my idol was Jo, the butchy girl with the motorcycle, on *The Facts of Life*. I remember being crushed when she got her first boyfriend. My current role models include my doctor and the Windfire facilitators.

My sixth grade PE teacher was a very important role model, I'll call her Ms. X. I was a butchy baby-dyke in a sea of hormone ridden breeder brats. Needless to say, I didn't have a lot in common with my classmates. I looked



E. Ann Hinds

down on them. They harassed me. Eventually it got so bad that my parents and the school had a conference to decide what to do. The school came up with this weird theory that if I were more physically adept, I would be more popular. So I was sent for PE tutoring with Ms. X, who was either a lesbian or one of those mythical straight women who lives with another straight woman, even to the point of their buying a house together. You can draw your own conclusion, as have I. PE was not my favorite subject, but she tried to make the tutoring fun. For the rest of the year, I spent a few afternoons a week jogging, lifting weights, learning to throw a javelin, whatever, and through it all, talking with Ms. X. I don't think the extra exercise was that beneficial, but the empathy was invaluable.

Most of the role models I've mentioned so far have shown me alternatives to the social system I've been in and the upper class aspirations my mother had for me. If I hadn't had these role models, I wouldn't have known that there were any alternatives.

I also have another kind of role model, who shows me that there is a place for people like me within the system. This term I came home on the first day of school all excited because one of my professors was women-identified, possibly a lesbian, definitely someone I could identify with. Having a role model at school helps me because there is a place for me there and makes it more meaningful to me. As a result, I take school more seriously and am happier there. So not only have role models helped me get where I am, they help me do better and be happier here. And I love my life, so, I want to thank all my role models, past, present, and future.

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