

just out

Coming out, step by step

Even though my mother allows me to attend Windfire meetings, it doesn't really mean that she approves of the group

BY MELISSA KILBY

Learning to cope with straight society has been one of the most difficult things about coming out. I was 15 when I really started to think about my sexuality. I'm now 17 and starting to deal with the closed-minded people of today's society. When I mention the idea of being a lesbian to some of my family members their reactions vary from "You're welcome in our home because we love you," to "I don't want you to come around here any more." The acceptance of my sexual orientation by my family is a matter all in itself, because some people in my family are really open-minded and find that accepting me is a lot easier than tearing my heart and their hearts apart. Other members of my family are very closed-minded and would rather not be "exposed" to my choice in life.

I've found that nothing I have said or done could change the way some members of my family think of me. I've not come out to all my family yet. I stress "yet" because I want some of my family to attend my high school graduation. For example, an uncle and his wife wouldn't allow me to be a part of their life or family if they knew I was a lesbian. I'm very proud of who I am and who I love, I just feel that they aren't ready to know.

I've gotten used to people being rude and crude to me and my friends because we are lesbians. I still have problems when I'm around members of my family who don't know that I'm a lesbian, although they do know that I've thought of it. They make comments about gay men or lesbians and know that I have a lot of gay friends, and they also know that what they are saying is making me angry. I'm afraid to ask them to be quiet because then they would question the fact that I'm standing up for something they feel I shouldn't stand up for.

In order for me to accept my sexuality I had to prove to myself that I was a lesbian. One of the steps to doing this was joining Windfire and another was dating someone and finding out for myself that I really care a lot about her. I'm now really comfortable with the way I feel and I want to tell the world that I'm a lesbian and proud of it.

The first time I went to my lover's house I felt really awkward because her family knows that I am a lesbian and that we are an item, but since I've gotten to know her family, I've become a lot more comfortable.

Being the only child left at home has its good and bad points. Even though my mother allows me to attend Windfire meetings, it doesn't really mean she approves of the group. She lets me attend the meetings hoping and praying that I'm going to come home and tell her I'm not a lesbian, which puts pressure on me. Even though my mom accepts me because I'm her only daughter and the only child left at home, she's always telling me that she would like to see me with a boy.

My mom respects my friends and their choice in life even though she would rather see me around "straight" kids my age. I respect her opinion on what I should do with my life and that she will never tell me that it's going to be the way she wants it. I listen to what she says and she lets me live my life the way I want to. When I mention being a lesbian to my mother she doesn't mind talking about it until I say something about *me* being a lesbian. When I do approach the subject I ask her about an old lesbian friend of hers and why she never sees her any more. My mom was proud of her friend because this lady was there for my mom when a friend was really needed, but they lost contact over the years. I hope that one day I'll meet this special friend of my mom's and then maybe I'll have someone close to my mom who understands me.

How do I deal with my peers? The small group of kids I grew up with (and attend high school with) learned to accept homosexuals when we were young because the mother of some of the kids is a lesbian. I believe that growing up around gays and lesbians is very rewarding to a kid because they grow up open-minded.

Every night I wonder what the next day is going to be like and how much more I will have to come out. I wonder if my friends will accept me and how it will affect my friendship with them. For example, after a Windfire meeting I was with my lover and we were waiting for her bus and we were kissing — now that didn't bother me at all. What did scare me was that after she left I saw someone from my school. I was afraid that if he saw us kissing he might say something to someone who would say something to someone else and I would have a major problem at school. The next day I saw him at school and he gave no indication that he had seen us kissing, but every time I see him in the hallway I think of what a big chance I'm taking every time I kiss or hold my lover's hand in public.

Day by day, step by step learning as each day and step goes by.

Who I will come out to next and what will be their reaction?

Will they accept me or will they disown me?

Living and learning as each day goes by.

Step by step every choice I make is a moment to hurt or a moment to cherish. Will I lose a straight friend or gain a better and stronger friendship? Day by day, step by step learning as each day and step goes by learning and living, living and learning.

What this all amounts to is that in my life I feel that there are some people I still have to learn to deal with and that some people are already accepting me. I realize that as I come out more and more it will get harder to cope with, but now I know I have friends and programs to turn to when I feel the need to just cry out.

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