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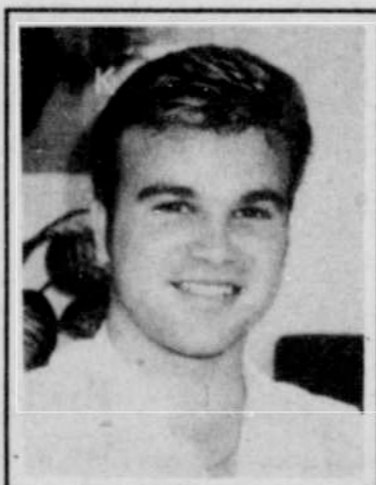
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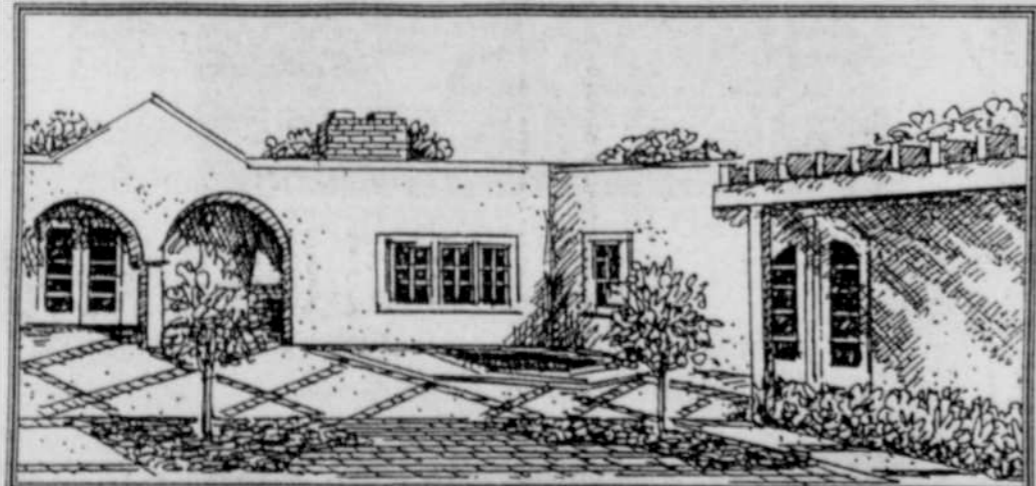
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Traveling out

A young gay man writes about his journey to a new culture

by Joseph Lyons

Have you ever gone to a town, resort, or country where you wanted to stay for the rest of your life? Think back. Most of us have been somewhere like that before.

The place for me has no name. It's usually quite peaceful. I'm there as often as I can and rarely come back. In fact, I've been there for so long, I can't remember when my last time back was.

I was fortunate enough to have a large group of travel agents. They worked as hard as they could to send me as safely and as encouraged as possible. The company didn't have a name; in fact, most of the people who took my case didn't even know each other.

There were Tom, Julia, Lucy and Jeff, my entire family, and I did my own research on the destination, as well. Tom and Jeff actually lived there themselves, which helped me adjust to the new society. Most of the others had at least seen the place where I was to go. Some of them had confused ideas about the place, however, and a hard time letting me go.

Some of the questions they asked me were "What's it like there?", "How can you stand the weather?", or "Why don't you come back where your family is?" People also tend to believe that they can counsel me on the society: "It's a lonely land.", "They're all savages.", or "You've got jungle fever...you're just curious."

In the beginning, I had a very hard time answering these questions. Eventually, however, I learned that I had to face the fact that these questions were pretty legitimate when I didn't even have the answers, myself.

I know now the answers to these questions and now even hate to have to answer them anymore. It gets rather boring. Repeating "It's my life. That's who I am. I'm them," is obviously not achieving my goals.

Furthermore, "I'm them," just doesn't sound right. "I'm we," seems closer yet, but very far from truth. Perhaps "I am me," explains it best;

but, that again is not a good enough answer. Most importantly, I believe, is that I feel good and if people don't like that, they have their own place to go. And go there they can. I really don't believe in this isolationist, nearly nationalistic view and perhaps, someday, I won't have to. Most people in my new culture do not feel that we should go to our corners. Personally, I say, "Let's mingle!"

Now, it didn't cost anything to make the trip, but I was still afraid to ask Mom if I could go. What might she say? Would she try counseling me with those questions? Or would she buy my plane ticket? Or might she send me on my way and change the locks on the door soon afterwards?

Well, Mom really flipped. She could not believe that I had proposed such a preposterous proposition. "Perhaps," I pondered, "is it possible that I put too much punch on the place and not the purpose? Plausible." I could not be too upset at Mom's reaction, however, as my education was so much more incredibly important. I was encouraged, though, when Mom finally accepted me and my destiny.

Of course, I never went anywhere, except for volunteering at Cascade AIDS Project and Windfire. But, I still feel as if I had been transcended up the continuum of life-- a daring adventure, at least.

Coming out is looked down upon, I find, nowadays. Let's do it and get it over. The situations in coming out, especially for a fifteen-year-old, however, are tremendous and possibly are the most traumatic ever experienced. Putting this story into allegoric form, I hope, helps to make the process more lucid or plain.

Everyone's story fits a metaphor like this. Maybe once you left home, you were never invited back, not even to stay. I've been able to bring this land home, into my own bedroom. No matter what, I own that land, and I can take it anywhere I want to. No one can conquer it.



Ofeola, Robert and Dee live together as a traditional Filipino family in Gresham. Three years ago, Robert who was 16 at the time, came out to his family. "I am proud of my son," says Ofeola. "You can't throw your kids away like trash just because they are a certain way. There is nothing to be ashamed of." Robert's older sister Dee is a lesbian.

PHOTO BY CATHERINE STAUFFER