

Significant influences

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it's OK to be who you are, whatever that is. The most influential person in my life has been Christine Jorgenson. Her autobiography and the movie about her were very inspirational to me. She showed me, and hopefully others, that for some it is a natural human trait to question and change the outward appearance of gender if what you look like doesn't fit what you really are."



PHOTO BY TER VENTURA

SYLVIA HACKATHORN

customer service representative, Irish musician and lead guitarist with the rock band *Unknown Soldiers*

I came out, finally, in my mid-20s, although my sexuality had really been defined at an early age. Mary, my best friend from about 10 years of age, heard me question aloud and saw my emotional and intellectual struggle with the concept of being gay. Her support and unwavering acceptance of who I am was a primary influence, not to mention a virtual lifesaver. But my realization that I was not an island came from literature.

Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West (her son Nigel's *Portrait of a Marriage* especially, when it came out in 1979), Audre Lorde and Kate Millet were all exceptionally recognizable and comforting. I was

always a romantic, and the putting to words by these women writers of their heart and souls helped me find the courage to walk as a lesbian through this world.

"I also have a keen memory of first hearing Ferron. I happened upon her performance without knowing anything about her. I couldn't believe my ears when I heard what she was singing about! Ah, the relief and joy of meeting up with a kindred spirit."

BARRY PACK

Right to Privacy executive director, avid tennis player and self-proclaimed Myers-Briggs INTP

[for those who may not know, Myers-Briggs is a standardized method of personality testing]

Martina Navratilova was it for me. My mom is English and her mom came over from England, so we watched Wimbledon every year. We knew Martina was lesbian, and she was the world's greatest tennis player. Although my mom was a Chris Evert fan, my whole family—even my mother—acknowledged that Martina was the best. She won more championships than anyone else in history! She was the first public figure I knew who was gay or lesbian, and she was so successful. She was a very positive role model for me.



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEVER

"It's funny you mentioned Boy George. I dressed as Boy George one Halloween in junior high. And when I was a freshman in high school, our drama class used lip-synching as a way to learn acting techniques and stage presence and I lip-synched to Boy George. I also had some

significant literary influences: Virginia Woolf, Oscar Wilde, E.M. Forster and Essex Hemphill were all very important to me. Their works were inspiring portrayals of gay life, what it could be, what it should be."

LESLIE GRIEP

McKenzie River Gathering office manager, self-proclaimed Myers-Briggs ESTJ

There was a professor in college. She was a total intellectual challenge for me. Her name was Laura Mumford. She was a straight woman, but a lesbian-positive feminist. She and her husband were both very androgynous. I took a feminist theory class from her. She really got me thinking. I was also really influenced by Adrienne Rich's *Lies, Secrets and Silence*. That was powerful. Oh, and Marilyn Frye. I think though, one of the most powerful influences on me was *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. I really identified with the main character. It's been so long ago that I forgot her name. I want to remember her name. [Was it Pecola?] Yeah, that's it, Pecola. I identified with Pecola's being the outsider, hating herself, wanting to be something other than she was, then accepting herself.

"On a more personal level it was my first childhood crush, on a girl named Patty Kramer. I was 6 or 7 years old. She was an older woman, like 10 or 11. I learned to play *Mambolina* on the piano because she could play it, and I wanted to be able to do everything she did."



PHOTO BY TER VENTURA



PHOTO BY TER VENTURA

"I would have to say Babe Didrikson Zaharias, the Olympic athlete and pro golfer, and my volleyball coach, Roberta Basko."

—Mickey Lee

ANDY MANGELS

publisher of *In Uniform, The Magazine*

Growing up a small-town farm boy in Montana, there were no role models for me until The Village People came along.

They were the only semi-openly gays who were famous enough to reach Big Fork, Montana. They were masculine role models who shaped my view that gay men could be as masculine, or hyper-masculine, as any of the good ol' boys in pickup trucks."



MARCY WESTERLING

Rural Organizing Project organizer, quilter



PHOTO BY LIQA KLEVER

It wasn't a heavy, thoughtful process for me. It was the woman I fell in love with. Because of her I came out as a lesbian and moved to Scappoose, Oregon. She's the reason I'm here."

THE REV. ROY COLE

Portland Metropolitan Community Church pastor

The person most responsible for helping me come out was a Jesuit priest named John McNeill. His book *Taking a Chance on God* helped me as a minister in a conservative church to see that faith, homosexuality and Christianity are not incompatible. I was so moved that I wrote a letter to McNeill filled with questions that arose for me from reading his book. McNeill called me on the telephone and spent 30 to 45 minutes answering my questions.

"I always knew that I was gay, but I repressed it until I was 31 years old because I believed that I could not be a Christian and a homosexual, until I read McNeill's book. Another person, well a couple actually, who were instrumental in helping me come to terms with being gay were Jan and J.A. Barber. J.A. was once my pastor, and he was my mentor in the ministry. Finally, there was an Episcopalian priest, Father Julius Rogina, who helped me develop my personal understanding of God, the Bible, spirituality, sexuality and humanity. This allowed me to fully integrate each component and establish a healthy view of my entire self."



FLOREID WALKER

Waddell and Reed Financial Services senior account executive

The person who influenced me most to come out as a lesbian was my public health instructor in nursing school, Judy. I was a

22-year-old nursing student who was eager to learn, and Judy taught me the finer points to the art of home visits. Of course, with lots of practice sessions, I learned quickly. That semester of public health nursing was followed by seven years of young lesbian love together. She was a great teacher, both in the classroom and the lab."



PHOTO BY ELLIN JANSSEN

CHRISTOPHER CUTTONE

aspiring writer, self-described dysfunctional Leo

I can only think of one real-life influence. His name is Stephen Ruth, and he is a friend of my aunt. They have been friends since they were in high school together in the '60s. Before I was old enough to know what gay was, I knew that he was different from most people and that his difference was OK with my family. When I finally did realize how he was different, before I knew that I, too, am different, it made me rethink some things. For instance, as a youngster I knew that to call another boy a 'faggot' was the worst thing you could say. After I realized that Stephen was a faggot and he was such a nice man, I knew it wasn't bad to be a faggot.

"Then there was the movie *Grease*. I saw it when I was about 6 years old. I couldn't decide on whom I had the bigger crush, John Travolta or Olivia Newton-John. It was many years later that I realized that others were different from me—in that most focused their sexual attention on just one gender. There are also a few homo-erotic scenes in that movie I could mention, but I won't."



PHOTO BY TER VENTURA

MICKEY LEE

Independent media specialist and all-around jock-butch-babe

I would have to say Babe Didrikson Zaharias, the Olympic athlete and pro golfer, and my volleyball coach, Roberta Basko. They were both very positive, athletic role models. Being a jock is how I express myself. It's my connection to who I am. In my early coming out, sports were my only outlet to be butch, at a time when being butch wasn't acceptable. I don't know their sexual orientations, but those women gave me powerful models and, by their examples, the courage to be who I am."

SCOT NAKAGAWA

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force national field director

The most significant influence in my entire life is my grandmother, Tsune Nakagawa. She raised me and instilled in me the most important values that guide me to this day. She was an agricultural worker who was widowed very young. Raising eight children on 75 cents a day taught her the importance of collective struggle and the need to organize workers. My grandmother inspired me to become an organizer by sharing stories with me of her involvement in organizing agricultural workers in Hawaii. Among the values I learned from my grandmother are recognizing the real contributions workers make, understanding the true meaning of power, and the importance of keeping very few secrets. That's a core value for me. I keep very few unnecessary secrets.

"My gay influences were the street youth in Hawaii with whom I spent most of my teen years. They call queens 'mahu,' and all lesbians are called 'butchies.' Among those youth, many were lesbians. I went on to become a social worker, and I worked with those kids."



PHOTO BY LINDA CARTER