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Gay today, gone tomorrow

Selective memory is the modus operandi
of mothers who pretend their sons aren't gay

I've discovered that my mother doesn't know I'm gay.

Really, I think it might be more accurate to say she seems to have forgotten I'm gay, because I don't see how she could possibly not know. But she's pretending not to.

I found out when she called my sister and, during the course of the conversation, suddenly asked Karen if I was dating any nice girls.

Karen, slightly confused, said no, she didn't think I was dating any nice girls.

"That's strange," my mother said. "He used to have so many girlfriends."

That part is true. I did have a few girlfriends. I even, briefly, got myself engaged to one of them. But we spent more time shopping together than we did making out, and even when I had my tongue in her mouth and my hand up her shirt I was thinking about how much nicer it would be to do the same thing with my baseball-player roommate.

In any case, that was quite a long time ago. I haven't pitched woo with a woman since college, and I'm sure my mother must

have noticed that I passed into my third decade with no apparent wedding plans. Even if she didn't, I've written a lot of gay-themed material, some of which she's seen. So her sudden cluelessness baffles me.

Because so much time has gone by without me actively seeing anyone, perhaps she believes I've forgotten I'm gay, and that if no one brings it up I'll start dating girls again.

No one in my family ever talks about anything personal, so it's really not shocking that this subject has never come up before. But the thing is, I was sure that we had addressed it in our own special way. Besides the books I've written, there was a conversation my mother and I had about religion, during which I am sure I outed myself. I've even written about it, for heaven's sake, so it must be true.

But not to hear her tell it. Despite all the evidence, she still seems to be waiting for me to settle down with a nice woman. So I'm in a quandary. Part of me is thrilled that I have a chance to out myself to a major figure in my life. I've never really gotten to do that before, primarily because no one I know really gives a rat's ass about such things.

Now I have an opportunity to surprise someone. I've dreamed about such a moment for years. But now that it's here, I don't really care anymore. In fact, I resent having to come out at all, to anyone. Why is it any of their business what I am or what I do? Why do gay people get stuck having to explain ourselves to the people in our lives? They don't have to justify to us why they love the people they love. Why should we?

So I think what I'm going to do is not say a

word. Sure, it would be fun to call mom up and say, "Hey, I hear you were asking after my girlfriends. Well, guess what? I have a boyfriend now. How do you like them apples?" But I know what she'd do. She'd pretend I didn't say it. That's our family's way.

A friend of mine calls it Baptist Selective Memory—when you look straight at the obvious and insist it isn't there. "It's too bad about uncle Henry being such a raging alcoholic," you might say, and mom will smile and reply, "Oh, honey, he just acts that way because he was struck by lightning during that big storm in '65. You know that."

You can't fight this kind of mental



Sure, it would be fun to call mom up and say, "Hey, I hear you were asking after my girlfriends. Well, guess what? I have a boyfriend now. How do you like them apples?"

illness, so you might as well join it. I used to think that when I settled down with the man I loved, I would want to take him home just to show the family I could do it, that gay men period could do it. But now that I have him, I see no reason to subject Dave to being called "Mike's special friend" and being asked if he is seeing any nice girls.

Instead of trying to explain to my mother, or to anyone else in my family, that I happen to be a man who loves men, I think I'm just going to let those who don't want to acknowledge it keep wondering. Or, even better, they can make up their own reasons for what they see as my ongoing bachelorhood.

"Is Mike gay?" someone will eventually ask my mother.

"Oh, no," she'll say. "Don't you remember that big storm in '82?"

■ **MICHAEL THOMAS FORD** is the Lambda Literary Award-winning author of *Alec Baldwin Doesn't Love Me and That's Mr. Faggot to You*. He welcomes e-mail at Shopiltee@aol.com.

MY QUEER LIFE
BY
MICHAEL
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FORD