



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Hawes (third from left) enjoys his moment in the spotlight during Peacock in the Park on June 30

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

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Hawes says he had not planned on telling his family right away—until they paid for his college, he jokes—but the secret soon made its way to his home.

"Giving such a speech in a small town, word gets around quickly," he says. "My parents know and are quite supportive. While it may not be a topic of family conversation, it is accepted. My mother and I talk about it quite often, as well as my love life."

Since that dramatic day in his English class, Hawes says life in Prineville has been relatively serene. Prior to the speech he occasionally heard the "stabs" of homophobic slurs and was the subject of a few rumors, but once he came out that all changed.

"There was nothing for people to talk about," he says. "It was quite peculiar but good all in all."

Hawes acknowledges Prineville is lacking in cultural and ethnic diversity, which conditions many people to reject anything outside the mainstream. But he says that he is friends with many of the prominent residents of the community and that the overall climate since he came out has been nothing but positive.

"The majority of the town is either indifferent or supportive," he says. "However, there are the select few who are very actively against homosexuality, and those few could make life miserable."

Hawes, who has known he was "different" as far back as he can remember, definitely struggled with his sexual orientation.

"It seemed from what I was hearing from various people around me that gay was bad, evil and wrong somehow," he says. "I developed the feeling that I was being punished, and I felt terrible, as if I had done something wrong. Time progressed, and I realized that I was myself, and this was me. I found out that there were other people out there like me, and some of the people around me might actually be wrong."

Hawes already has developed a relationship with a "significant other," which he admits surprises him.

"Until I met Kyle I did not think there was anyone out there that I would click with for the long term," he says. "I assumed that I would be spending my life alone, which saddened me. But Kyle and I do have a healthy relationship, one that I enjoy very much and learn from every day. We share common goals, aspirations, work ethics and intuitions."

Hawes' step out of the closet also paid off in another way. At this summer's Peacock in the Park he was awarded an Audria M. Edwards Scholarship, which was "an absolute thrill."

"To know that I had such support from the gay community gave me such peace of mind," he says. "Not only financial but moral support is a wonderful feeling."

Hawes will use the money to study premed at Linfield, with the long-term goal of becoming a plastic surgeon. He also is looking forward to attending school in Southeast Asia during the undergraduate program.

Although Hawes has big plans for the future, he also has good memories of his past in Prineville. Even though he generally has found acceptance in his hometown, he advises other young gays and lesbians in rural Oregon to come out carefully.

"Make sure that you have your ducks in a row and that you are ready," he says. "You cannot completely predict how everyone will react. Always count on your best friends to be there for you...they will be. And know yourself well, what you stand for and what you believe in. This is all about you, and you are doing this for yourself. Coming out gave me a huge sense of security and stress relief. No longer did I have to watch

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—Morgan Hawes

everything I said, did or how I acted. I could be me, and people knew who I was. Coming out is a great feeling, but people should do so at their own discretion." ■

MORGAN HAWES would be happy to share his experiences with others who are facing similar challenges. He can be reached at captainmorganboi@hotmail.com.

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