

# A Weekend in Gay Jerusalem

I am a born-again gay. That's what I consider myself, though I rarely declare so publicly. I grew up in a Pentecostal church. I started experimenting with boys in junior high and high school (experimentation became standard practice). Right after graduation, I attended bible college, but got expelled (shocking). Following my short theological stint, I came out to family; my friends (those not lacking in powers of perception) knew sooner. The caveat: my tiny bible college was in Northern California, a short jaunt inland from San Francisco. A closeted gay kid journeys to a city near San Francisco to "get straight." Sweet irony.

My classmates and I often ventured into San Francisco. Our college leaders preached about the city's sin and depravity, about lascivious homosexuals freely roaming the Castro (who were always recruiting). In my guarded, closeted queer mind, I allowed brief fantasies about joining. In large, insulated groups, we'd saunter past gays on Castro, balking at their openness, laughing at their flamboyance. I'd crave contact, but stifle it, hoping rejection would lead to reprogramming.

To celebrate my last birthday, my friends and I spent a long weekend there. I've visited San Francisco countless times since bible college; I feel renewed every time. I've gone with friends, boyfriends—even family. This trip, however, felt different. As I arrived at the



LADY ABOUT TOWN

by Daniel Borgen

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airport and headed into the city, I wondered why so many old memories surfaced. Why were my ghosts of closet-case past still so intent on haunting me?

We stayed with a dear friend—and Portland native—in North Beach. Once settled, we set out to conquer the city, basking in the waning sunlight on Embarcadero before exploring bars on Folsom and in the Castro. I recalled similar treks during college, noting how wholly different life was. I noticed countless (yes, *countless*) amazing men, but romance and sex didn't register on my radar—a startling first. Instead, I pondered my dramatic paradigm shift. What might the old me think of the new one? How eas-

ily could I have become a George Rekers or Ted Haggard? No matter the extent of my deprogramming, no matter how fervently I dismantle indoctrination, I fear the lifelong quandary—did it *work*?

Our second night there, an old friend from bible college—we've remained close, he also made the great escape—met us in the city. After dinner, he and his wife joined us for a big gay night out. Folsom first, Castro second. I worried if they'd be comfortable at queer bars. Yes, I'm out, but they'd never seen me and my friends in full-fledged gay action. *Here I am*, I thought. *All this time, I'm still terrified to mix past with present.*

Together, we traversed the gay scene. We started at a club night we dubbed "Night of a Thousand Bears." Driving down Folsom, we witnessed an inconspicuous, live sex act on a Honda Accord. Horrifying, yes—of course no one actually wants (or hopes) to watch that. Still, I marveled. I imagined my younger self haranguing, with my friend from bible college, about the sin. Oh, the sin! Yet here we were this time, circling back around again, laughing, mesmerized for very different reasons.

As new and old friends merged, I considered the strange ways life strives for balance; life remains intent on forcing you to tackle your demons. While young, I sprinted away from the gay, intent on escape. And there I was, essentially back where I started, mak-

ing peace with the past that still sometimes shames me. I don't have everything figured out—absolutely not. But I do treasure brief, fleeting epiphanies. My souvenir: realizing that reconciliation comes when we bare all, everything, even if we fear the worst. The people still standing around you afterward? Keep those.

One souvenir I didn't bring back: a torrid, brief love affair. When in New York last fall, men swooned when I mentioned Portland—I felt like a celebrity. In SF, many recoiled, acting as if I ordered them to go face down in Betty White's dusty muffin. One friend emphatically observed throughout the trip, "No one's talking to me!" "No one likes me!" Despite my weekend-long obsession with chasing ghosts, I noticed, too. San Francisco is decidedly California. They own the sun and have a monopoly on aesthetics. The trip certainly inspired me to want to renew my gym membership. But, for all of its forgivable shortcomings, that city will remain my first, true, complicated love.

And like most firsts, it helped make me who I am, decidedly un-Rekers. The anti-Haggard. Completely Lady. **JO**

*Daniel wishes Pentecostals would stop leaving church literature on his doorstep and his car. Reach him at [danielborgen@gmail.com](mailto:danielborgen@gmail.com)—unless you're sending church literature.*

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