



COMING OUT QUANDARIES

Telling the family is one thing, but the days that follow coming out can be the real challenge. The poignant issue of telling the truth.

The simple truth is that I'm terrible in situations that force me to come out; specifically, situations with my own family. I am a logical and sensible guy, but when confronted with these situations, I often find myself in a zombie-like state with a checklist of nonsensical symptoms. Audible but unintelligible mumbling? Check. Swiftly darting eyes that could be indicative of a neurological condition? Check. Overwhelming urge to flee before I'm crushed to death by awkwardness? Big check.

I don't act this way with coworkers or strangers. I have no problem chatting with my coworkers about weekend plans with my boyfriend or even telling some random clerk at a video game store what games we play together. There is no heart-wrenching panic or vacuum of awkwardness — just me having a conversation with another person.

I am not ashamed of who I am. That isn't the issue here. For me, it's the unknown. What if this person reacts poorly? What if they quote Bible verses or misinformed scientific studies? What if they try to purify me with holy water and I actually do burst into flames? OK, that last example is unlikely, but this is what my panic-addled brain puts me through.

My experience with my own family has been less than comical. I came out to my parents in 2006 with mostly disastrous results. Full of conflicted feelings and confusion, I hurt myself, which unfortunately became the focal point of the situation. My wounds healed, I moved away to college, and we didn't talk about it. I hurt myself again in 2008 and we didn't talk about it. Now, in 2012, after being in a relationship for over 2 years with someone I love, we still barely talk about it.

I used to resent them for their poor reaction and handling of the situation — I sought help and I didn't receive it. The isolation and loneliness created by that silence, mixed with shame for even bringing it up in the first place, made my situation even more difficult to handle. In retrospect, though, I understand their myopic judgment and lack of

direction. I was always the "good kid." They never had to worry about their straight-A, dedicated, loyal son who never drank, smoked or fell in with the wrong crowd. The son who loved education, writing, video games, and who could stay out late on school nights because they knew he wouldn't do anything foolish.

The truth is simple.
It's what comes
after the truth that
is difficult.

I took their near-perfect image of me and shattered it. I became the opposite of what they knew and they didn't know how to handle it.

I look at those days realistically, though. We both made poor decisions and there's no point in blaming anyone for anything. These events are just bullets on a list — itemized disasters of a person's life — and we all have them. We live it, we learn from it, and we move on.

All of this, though, stands in stark contrast to perhaps my deepest conflict. For all the people I've come out to in my life — friends, my parents, coworkers, even strangers — I've yet to come out to my grandparents. And despite all the outcomes of these situations, which run the gamut from cripplingly negative to soul-enriching positive, I can't do it and even if I wanted to, I don't know how.