

Not sure whether to start with me or my brother, but I guess giving my background first will help explain some things. Both of my parents are very active Christians, and my mother's side of the family is all very religious. Our family, being my older sister, me, and my younger brother, was raised Christian by my parents. We moved around a couple of times during my life, but the important place in my history was California, where I spent the ass end of elementary school, and the entirety of Middle school/Jr. High. Those last few years of Jr. High were hell for me, because several of my friends who I'd made over the previous years basically just turned their backs on me or would actively tease/bully me. The reason why? Because I wouldn't ever really join in with them when talking about the girls they'd want to date, or how sexy such and such actress was, or the stupid little porn flash games they'd play, or any other number of things like that. So they started calling me Gay, faggot, telling me I really had a vagina, and pretty much all of the horrible stuff that jr. high schoolers say to each other. I got really depressed over it, and while I never, ever, saw suicide as a thing that I'd want to do, I certainly spent more time crying alone than I would have liked.

My parents were very supportive during that time, even though I never gave them the full details of what was going on. Pretty much the only reason I never really did consider suicide as a thing was because of how involved with my life my dad was, and my belief that God was with me at all times. For the longest time, I thought that the reason I wasn't so much into talking about the physical qualities of girls or talking about sex or any of that stuff was because I was being a good, young, Christian. (It's pretty ingrained in the faith that sex before marriage is wrong, that lust is wrong, and all that jazz.) And while I still think that was a part of it, after 7 long years of self reflection, learning, and maturing, I can pretty readily say that my sexuality definitely had something to do with it.

We moved out of California just as I was transitioning into high school, so the move wasn't anywhere near as traumatic as they normally are. I had already lost all my friends anyways, or at least most of them. (I had one guy who stood by me pretty strong, which was nice.) So I had a fresh start in Austin, Texas, and made a couple of good friends throughout my high school career. High school is also where I more or less figured out that gay people aren't out to rape the world, even if my ideas of sexuality and identity were muddy at best. (I never really knew anyone who was gay personally, other than the girl who identified as bisexual who sat next to me in a word processing class.)

After high school, I headed off to Texas A&M, and my brother started high school. This is where things get a little more personal, so I'll keep the details to a minimum, but being away from a fairly religious home for the first time, having access to the internet on a laptop, and being alone a lot in a dorm room; well, let's just say that I figured out I didn't quite have the aversion to two men in a sexual situation that most straight people I knew had. But for me at the time, porn was porn, no matter the participants, and when it's abused like I was abusing it, the normal relational side of sexuality is removed in favor of instant sexual gratification. This is where I started to question my sexuality, but sexuality and sexual fantasy are two different things. I knew I

had an attraction to women, but I'd never really thought about guys in the same way. So I kept identifying as straight. I also kept up with my personal religious beliefs through my time at A&M, even if I wasn't really going to church so much anymore.

Again, not going into too much detail, but due to a combination of things, mostly related to a late diagnosis of ADHD (predominantly inattentive type) and to my overall low maturity level, I failed out of A&M after a semester and a half. The best thing I got out of it was a Gender Studies class I took, which opened my eyes a lot to the world of sexuality and identity and how much misinformation is flying around society these days. It also introduced me to the website <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/>, which I highly recommend. It's a great resource.

So after dropping out, I started living at home again, took a few classes at a community college and worked a couple of jobs. My brother was still in high school, and I got to hang around with him a bit more. He'd always been a bit against the grain of masculinity. Loved cooking, hung out with a lot of girls, but never really got involved with any of them, loved dressing up and talking about fashion and making fun of people's fashion faux pas. I never really thought to myself, "Well, he might be gay" but the idea was sort of there. So one day we were walking around the mall, and he pulled me aside to say, "Hey, there's something I want to tell you..." His voice trailed off after that, and I could see this sort of apprehension on his face, like he was holding his breath. So in a sort of joking, sort of guessing manner, I just said, "What? That you're gay?"

He just let out this long sigh of relief and said, "Oh yeah! How did you know?" And I really wasn't as surprised as I thought I'd be. It made a lot of sense in context. I was the third person of our family he'd told at that point in time, the other two being my sister, and one of my Aunts out in California that he'd been facebook chatting with quite a bit. Which is actually how my parents found out. I'm still not sure exactly what happened, but they somehow opened up one of his facebook chat windows and saw his conversation with her about being gay. So rather than my brother telling my parents when he was ready to, they jumped the gun.

For a short while it was pretty bad. My dad had been doing this home bible study thing with us as a family, and just a few weeks previous the subject had been homosexuality as a sin. My parents had subscribed to the belief that you should hate the sin, not the sinner. Not realizing that sexuality is a very, very important part of self identity. So telling someone that you love them but hate that they are gay is hypocritical at best, and is about the same as saying, "I hate the very core of your being."

So of course tensions were high around the homestead for a while. I started taking a few more classes and working longer hours, so I wasn't around the house much, but even then you could feel this sort of heaviness in the air between my brother and my father. My mother would just stress out all the time, trying to figure out if my brother had been abused, or what had caused him to "turn homosexual." They searched his computer for porn (which they didn't find), set him up with a counselor to help him "get healthy,"

and generally just weren't making the best choices on how to approach the subject. That isn't to say that they didn't still love him, because they did. They just wanted to understand something that they'd never had to address before. I stood by him as well I could during all this, but working a fulltime job and taking classes kinda kept me out of the loop for a while.

But, as they say, Things Got Better for my brother. For the longest time, he actually had more acceptance of his sexuality at the high school than he did at home. Though personally I think he spent a bit too much time trying to be the clichéd "sassy gay friend" from Mean Girls rather than just trying to be himself, that's neither here nor there.

What my brother's coming out did do is it forced my parents to actually approach the subject of homosexuality in a new light. My dad was just inches away from getting his PhD in I think it was Old Testament theology from Fuller Seminary in California before we moved, and he's worked in a church setting for a long while. So he knew how to study the bible, and how to apply context to what he's reading. So for probably the first time in his life, he actually researched sexuality through various books and articles and resources, and then studied the bible for himself to come to his own conclusions. Which, in all honesty, is something that I think every single Christian should do. All too often we just sort of skate by on what others tell us to think, without actually taking the time to inform ourselves and come to our own conclusions.

For me, I can boil Christianity down into basically three things that are the heart of the matter. Not trying to get preachy here, just saying what I personally believe: Jesus is the son of God, died for our sins so that those who believe in him can reach heaven, and that we should love our neighbor as we love ourselves. In addition to that core, we shouldn't judge others, because in the end every single one of us has failed our personal moral compass at some point.

I had a talk with my dad about some of this recently. He'd taken my brother and mother to a Human Rights Campaign Gala in Austin, which unfortunately I wasn't able to attend due to work. So while on a long car ride, with my dad as a captive audience, I just asked him about it. He said that he'd worked through a lot of the issues that he'd had previously by doing his own research. He realized how awful it was every time he said that phrase "hate the sin, not the sinner." He realized that loving and supporting my brother as a parent took precedent over anything else, and like Octavia said, he was halted by the idea that we've locked down on this single verse in Leviticus amid a number of other verses that we simply threw out of the window for not being culturally relevant anymore.

He's still on the fence about it, but now concedes that a biblical case supporting homosexuality can be made. More importantly though, my father decided that in the long run those rules aren't what's most important in the bible. Being sin free isn't what gets you into heaven, and that the most important thing for him to do right now is to love and support my brother as he figures out just who he wants to be.

And hearing that from my dad, well, that made me a lot more proud to be his son, and it helped me within my own identity of faith. There is absolutely no reason you can't be a Christian and have an orientation other than straight. I still haven't "come out" to my parents. I've told my brother and one of my closest friends from high school that I'm questioning pansexual. My brother understood it right away, and my friend just really didn't seem to care one way or the other. We've always been pretty close, so it probably wasn't much of a surprise to him. (He's also a straight gay rights supporter.)

Honestly, I don't know when I'll ever get around to bringing it up with my parents. Partially because I'm still in the questioning phase of it, and I want to be certain of who I am before making an announcement, but also partially because I don't want it to be this sort of "OH YEAH, I'M NOT STRAIGHT EITHER" thing right on the tail of my brother coming out. I'm not really scared of how they'll take it at this point, but pansexuality and bisexuality are kinda a tricky position to be in since neither is really understood. With Christianity, there's this idea that if you can avoid a sin, than you should. I don't think I would consider loving someone regardless of gender a sin, but every now and then I get this backwards thought that since I have the potential to like any of the sexes, it's like I have a choice between sinning or not sinning. It would certainly be a lot easier for me to simply drop the religion and live a "free" life, but I can't. I've seen enough things in my life that point towards the existence of some sort of higher power, and it's an important part of my self identity, right next to my sexuality. Maybe I'll talk with my dad about it sometime in the future, since he's got a lot more biblical learning than I could ever hope for. That's one thing that I love about being 21. I finally feel like I can have discussions with my father at a more equal level.

Sorry, this still kinda got long and rambling, and I'm not really sure what message I was trying to get across with it. I guess what I wanted to come away from it with is that you can break through socially imposed misconceptions, and that the times are changing. It's a slow moving change, but if my parents can do it, maybe others can too.