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## **Introduction**

I used to say there are those in the closet, and there are those in the closet under mounds of old sweaters and dirty laundry. But sometimes, there are those in the closet, who want to come out, but just can't find the door. A door can be a very scary thing to open alone.

I used to hide in the closet when I was small. My family had a linen closet at the top of the stairs next to the bathroom. I could squeeze myself up on the third shelf, if there weren't too many towels. Nobody ever found me there. It was the best spot to hide. I used to hide there a lot when my parents were fighting, or when I just wanted to be left alone. I could shut the door, curl up with the towels, and disappear.

There are a few downsides to closets though. No one can find you, but no one can hear you cry either. Sooner or later you have to turn on the light, open the door and come out. This is my closet door opening and I'm coming out screaming.

## **Squinted her Eyes Open**

The plane began to take off. Nice empty flight. Everyone had a row to themselves. Shaking back and forth, and up and down it seemed like it would never get off the ground. She closed her eyes for a moment and crossed her fingers. As she felt her body pressed into her seat, she squinted her eyes open to see the plane was already well above the ground. She loved the small propeller driven commuter planes. Once in the air her eyes were glued to the window, and the constant change of shapes and sizes on the ground. She wondered what the story was in each house? Town after town passed under her. There were many little houses all getting smaller and smaller. Again she questioned, what is their story? Who is the their town hero? What is the town scandal? But as the towns got smaller and the houses turned into merely little spots of ink against the graying white canvas, the whisper of stories and scandals all seemed to fade and disappear

The plane's wing dipped towards the ground superimposing a darkness on her side of the plane. Light began to shine through the windows across the aisle. The plane was turning.

The stewardess came around with drinks and snacks. She moved her attention to the other passengers on the plane. Could any of them be running away from a scandal in one of the little towns near the airport she just passed over. Did some also feel the pain and frustration begin to fade and disappear with the distance. As she looked about the cabin, there in the back was a girl scribbling on a note pad. She had green-blue hair. Now there was a story.

### **Florida's Finest**

"Coffee please." The stewardess smiled. "Would you like some juice too, this flight is pretty empty and we have extra." "Sure."

She pulled out her notebook and began a character sketch. Now what did her book say? She thumbed to the page marked with a sticky note.

*"A character sketch is a word outline"* blah blah. *" Take your writer's notebook to a public place and use the categories from the chart on the next page .... "* blah blah. *"Height, weight, sex, hair, dress, body. Shoes, face, mouth, poses, build, age,"* what a long list.

Ok, basically make an outline of physical characteristics, note their possessions, then make up shit about motive and a background. She wrote down on one side of the page the list from the book. Hair green. She couldn't see her too well, but she did notice she had a notebook too. However the green haired girl's was a smaller flip kind. After wrestling with her full sized notebook on the little tray table with two drinks for the next few minutes she thought maybe the green haired girl had a good idea. A little flip-book would have been easier.

She turned back around again trying to notice as much as she could with short glances. She could mostly only see the top of her head and part of the tray table. Good thing the green one was in an aisle seat. She has greenish blue hair with dark roots, fairly curly, and short. Height? Ugh her first thought ..No idea, she was sitting down. Ok, relax concentrate. She sat higher in the seat than the person in front of her. She guessed she was probably fairly tall. She jotted down "5.7."

"Damn-it! Damn-it! Damn-it!" The man sitting directly in front of her yelled. He was jerking around violently. She thought he was going to shake her tray table spilling her coffee, all over her notebook. "DAMN-ITDAMN-ITDAMN-IT!" He burst out again as if it was one long word. The stewardess came back and started to assist him. He yelled at her for opening his can of Orange Juice. Apparently he thought it was still closed and started shaking it, spilling OJ all over his suit. Again, "Damn-it, Damn-it, Damn-it!" He was still squirming in his seat.

She quickly moved her coffee and juice over to the other tray table. Just as she placed the drinks down, he wrestled himself out of the seat, making her tray table pop up. Phew! Her drinks could be in her lap right now.

The man waddled his way up to the front of the little plane. He was an older man, with graying hair, to match his graying suit. He wore a pair of distressed wing tips, a power tie, and thick rimmed glasses, all decorated with drops of Florida's finest.

### **Just like to Pretend**

Mr. Power-tie and wingtips stood at the front of the plane and ordered the stewardess to give him a Canada Dry Seltzer. Every spot on his suit and shirt was addressed.

He asked the stewardess if he could move to a different seat. She of course agreed.

He gathered up his newspaper, and headed toward the back of the plane, stopping in front of the green-haired girl. He carefully set his things down and looked over the seat at her grumbling, "Since when do they open the cans for you?"

She didn't seem to hear him. He of course repeated himself, not wishing to be ignored. The girl calmly lifted her head from her notebook. In a surprisingly deep voice she replied "On every flight I've ever been on." You could hear muffled laughter rise up from the other seats. He hesitated then added, "How often, do you, fly anyway?" Just as calm as before she again lifted her head from her writing, "About three times a year. I fly into Boston to meet my publisher." He gasped with contempt. "You? You're a writer?"

"No, I just like to pretend I'm one whenever I fly." Her deep voice sounded calming with just a hint of sarcasm. The green one looked back down at her notebook and continued writing.

After this exchange between the calm green one and the grumpy businessman she flipped through her own notebook. Was the green one really a writer? She's not going to be if she doesn't at least finish a character study. She couldn't keep looking back. Ok, time to move on to motive, and background details. She sat and stared at the list, nothing. Motive for what, dying her hair green?

She had to get more of the chart filled out first. Green hair and 5'7" wasn't much to base a character on. She pretended to be getting something from under the seat and looked back again. The green one had a backpack under the seat in front of her with the initials J.I.M. She wore chunky black shoes stained with salt. Her socks didn't match; one red and the other blue.

She sat up in the chair and made her notes. What could be the motive for wearing two different color socks. Maybe she got dressed in a hurry this morning to catch the plane. Colorblind?

Ok, one more glance back. Her pants were dark gray, cargo style. She wore a T-shirt with a black long john top underneath.. She recognized the emblem on the T-shirt, Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe Records' logo.

She wrote with her left hand, and ran her right hand through her green mop and revealed a silver bands on her ring finger, and a thumb. During all the glancing and staring the green one didn't seem to notice. She never even looked up from her notebook. Only paused occasionally to sip her coffee.

This was getting too interesting. She decided she wanted to see more. She could only see about a third of her face. What other personal belongings could be on the seat next to her? It's time for a walk to the back of the plane, just to stretch her legs.

### **You're the Writer**

As she stood up she noticed the green one had coffee and juice just like her on the table next to her. As she moved closer she could see a copy of the travel section of the newspaper, half a pack of gum, pages ripped from the notebook , and neatly folded in half, and an extra bag of peanuts, and 3 cheap plastic mechanical pencils on the seat next to her. She must have paused too long because the green one looked up.

She had green eyes, fair skin, and looked smaller in the seat than she expected. She held her stare for just a moment and the plane began to shake tossing her into the green one's lap.

"Oh, sorry! Oh-my-god! Oh shit!" she cried out. The green one's low voice boomed out, "Damn-it, damn-it, damn-it!" A burst of laughter rose about the cabin. As she steadied herself and stood up, the green one smiled and said, "If you're trying to write a character sketch, it might be easier if you sat across the aisle from me."

She turned red, and blurted out, "thank you, my name is Carrie." The green one ripped out a few pages from her notebook and grabbed a pencil. She turned to Carrie, "Here you'll need these."

Carrie nervously looked up accepting the paper and pencil. "Excuse me, I didn't catch your name?"

"You're the writer. You tell me."

Carrie sat down and picked up her pencil. She leaned forward and began to write.

## **Deep**

I was always called Jim, not sure how it started but it stuck. I was the typical tomboy. I was criticized about the way I dressed, walked, and my mannerisms. My personal favorite criticism was about my voice.

My mother said my voice was too deep. I can still hear her telling me to try and talk with a higher voice. Every time I got off the phone, she would accuse me of purposely talking with a lower voice on the phone.

Yeah ma, that's just what I want to do, make myself the freak of 6<sup>th</sup> grade?

Why do you make your voice so deep when you talk?

Who's making it deep? That's my voice!

It's not normal, try to make it higher.

Sure ma, I'll get right on that, soon as I finish painting my toe nails pink.

Ok, so my voice was deep, but I never thought too much of it. What the hell does my mother know anyway. She's stuck in a bad marriage with two pain in the ass kids. Like I'm going to listen to her advice?

It was late. Actually it was early, about 5am. We were sitting outside Brighton Doughnuts on the curb eating chocolate glazed munchkins. "What time are we meeting tomorrow?" I lit another cigarette, hoping the answer was later than last week. She looked at me like I was stupid. "You know the time. It's at noon. It's always at noon."

"Why the hell do we have to meet so early? By the time I get home, I'll have to be at Perkins in 6 hours." I stared at a car driving by. One headlight was out. Now where the hell was he going at 5am on a Sunday. Poor bugger probably headed to work at Wegmans (local super-store grocery) like I'll be doing Monday "Maybe I won't go tomorrow."

"Cindy is going to be there. She's going to meet you, ya know. Don't you want to see Cindy?"

"I guess so."

I was driving fast trying to make it to Perkins in Penfield. It was already pushing 12:30. My eyes were stinging because my contacts didn't get to cook the full 6 hours. Why do we go out every Saturday then agree to meet about 5 hours after we just went to bed?

### **By the time I finish my song.**

I walked in and found the crew in the usual back booth. My friend from the doughnut shop looked up and said, "Hey butthead, you made it. We thought you were going to sleep in."

"Yeah yeah, well I was just eating doughnuts 5 hours ago." I looked over to Cindy; "Hey, Cindy, nice to see you at one of our morning socials."

She stared at me with the strangest look on her face that I stopped and stood there. She asked me what I was doing.

“Uhm I thought you came to see me. I was thinking of sitting down and having some coffee. Is there a problem?”

I looked at my friends, for answers, since now she was getting upset, asking them repeatedly. “Why is she doing that? Stressing the “is,” and repeating, “Why *is* she doing that?”

“Doing what? What’s wrong?” Now thinking there’s some joke I missed by being late. I looked at my friends quite confused.

Finally someone said, “Cindy that is her natural voice.” Another added, “Jim has a deep voice. You probably never noticed it in the bar; I had the same reaction when I first met her.” In the silence that followed, I thought, “Who invited my fucking mother?”

Cindy looked at me in amazement. In that moment I realized two things. First, we had never spoken outside of the bar; not even on the phone before. Considering we were good friends that was weird. Second, I realized that my voice was deep; deep to the point of being one of the many “gender barriers” I seem to cross or break. And, more importantly, I learned that this crossing of gender upsets people.

Standing there in front of the booth, not sure if I wanted to sit down, I suddenly remembered that game from Sesame Street. The game where the tv displayed 4 objects in table. Your job as the viewer was to determine which object was different from the other 3. The one remember had baseball, a vollyball, a basketball and pear. While you’re deciding a little song played.

One of these things is not like the others,  
One of these things just doesn't belong,  
Can you tell which thing is not like the others  
By the time I finish my song?

Did you guess which thing was not like the others?  
Did you guess which thing just doesn't belong?<sup>1</sup>

*"Does not belong"* rang in my head. Here I am standing in the middle of Perkins with a Sesame Street song in my head. How'd the fuck I get here?

### **Freak on Stage**

My growing up was pre- Ellen, pre-kd lang, pre-Melissa Etheridge, pre Ani Difranco, pre Lea Delaria, pre any dyke on TV or the radio. There may have been a few Gay males but I never saw any Gay females. Every song I heard, every show was for heterosexuals only. Not-heterosexual was not allowed. Not-heterosexual was wrong. Not-heterosexual didn't exist.

By the time I was 13 I knew something was wrong with me. One afternoon while my mother was downstairs teaching piano, I was watching "The Phil Donahue Show" with the sound turned down really low, and the door shut. The show featured transsexuals, and homosexuals. They'd either be monsters I had no connection with or normal people. Either way, at 13 this show held the answer to whom and what I am. I sat real close to the TV, and looked at the people intently, paying close attention to the audience, and their reaction to each person. The guests were one female to male transsexual, one male to female transsexual, a Gay man and a Gay woman.

The audience had a definite preference for the transsexuals over the homosexuals. They viewed trans people as having a physical or medical condition. It wasn't their fault, and this was a problem modern medicine could fix. Gays however had a mental problem. This was some perversion they chose. It was clear Gays were not accepted, and being Gay was wrong.

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<sup>1</sup> "One of These Things" from *Sesame Street*, by Joe Raposo and Jon Stone  
appendix\_B\_A\_Girl\_called\_jim.doc

The female to male transsexual was accepted more than anyone else on the stage. He looked the most normal or passing. Unlike the rest of the guests he could step right into the audience, take a seat, and no one would notice.

Hope returned. Now I understood, I just need this sex change thing then I too can sit into the audience. Next, the transition procedure and sexual reassignment surgeries for both sexes were explained. This involved spending a year living as the other sex, being injected with hormones, and it only got worse from there. During the commercial break, I began to sweat. I wasn't ready for all that. But I knew I couldn't be Gay. Everyone hated Gays, everyone.

After another commercial the freaks were back on stage with an expert. This expert stated people choose to be Gay, and no one is born Gay. At that exact moment I jumped up and turned off the TV. Sitting in the room by myself I began to repeat, "I choose not be Gay. I choose not to be Gay."  
I choose not to be Gay."

After turning off the TV I still was unsure of what I was. Although, that wasn't as important as learning what I wasn't. Further, I was different, and I could never let that difference be found out. So I just kept chanting, whenever I was afraid, I kept chanting.

Now years later, standing in the middle of Perkins at 12:35 on a Sunday afternoon surrounded by Gay women, I was on that stage. In front of me was my friend Cindy, sitting in the audience, shocked at my difference. I waited for her to move over, and then sat down.

### **Female Friends**

A cute waitress showed up with my coffee. I hate Perkins coffee. Usually I drink it black if it's any good, but here I drown the taste with sugar. Cindy is still talking about

how strange my voice is as I light a cigarette. This wasn't the first time I my difference became a topic of conversation among my friends.

Dr Dott my junior high counselor, a tall balding man with a little pot belly. He seemed intrigued by the troubles of today's youth. Especially, those of us who wrote our thoughts down and kept them in folders and notebooks.

Loniless is a cold word  
It can be felt,  
But never heard.

I never said it was very good. Dr. Dott read everything I wrote, and even asked to keep my collections for days. The latest was a tattered blue notebook with page after page of midnight mumblings, studyhall sermons, and bus ride ruminations with a picture of Matt Dillon from *The Outsiders*. I wrote mostly because I rarely slept at night, staring into the dark and writing whatever came to mind. Writing was something I had to do. I had to get it out, write it down, and move on. He called them poems. I didn't. Dr. Dott said they were like peaking under my closet door. Funny that.

Every Thursday I would go spend a class period with him. I would sit there while he thumbed through my latest entries. Today while leaning back in the big chair he asked "What do you think about your relationships with your friends?"

Cocking one eyebrow up, "What do you mean?"

He leaned forward. "Your poems all talk about loneliness, and not belonging. Why do you feel you don't belong? You have friends, right?"

"Yeah, I hang with people, I have friends"

Are you closer to your female friends?

Totally not understanding what he was getting at I answered, "Aren't all girls closer to their girlfriends?"

Why do they call you Jim, or Billy?

How do you know what my friends call me?

You're not the only one in counseling?

And you talk about me to my friends during their counseling?

He twitched and sighed. Leaning back again running his hand through what was left of his hair I could tell he didn't have an answer, or didn't want to. Side stepping my question he said he thinks I may have an "unnatural attachment to female friends." I got up and left.

I went back the next week; I don't know why. Maybe I was too young to say I don't want to go, maybe since I now knew my friends went I thought it was ok, but for whatever reason I kept going. Later I found out Dr. Dott told my parents I had a "sexual identity problem." I really didn't realize he could pass along anything I said to my parents.

We didn't talk about my problem after this day. I started writing more morbidly, alluding to suicide and drugs. From then on when he tried to bring up the topic of my "unnatural attachments," I would start talking about suicide. Maybe he was ready to discuss my unnaturalness, but I was not.

### **Like talking to a guy**

Maybe I did have a sexual identity problem. Looking back now, I wonder would it have been such an issue if being Gay was not considered a "problem?" When I heard

“sexual identity problem,” it triggered two things. The word *problem* bothered me, more than sexual identity. I didn’t even have a boyfriend yet. Wasn’t sure I wanted one, but knew they were required to belong.

Drinking made boyfriends possible. I could feel relaxed around guys and if you are female and drunk you find boyfriends easily. Boyfriends had one great result. No matter how temporary my boyfriends were, they consequently stopped questions about my sexuality. Well at least they stopped other’s questions, but nothing ever stopped my questions.

Tom was one of my boyfriends. Not in reality but we both let people think there was something going on. He was a big, blonde muscular boy who went to a private Catholic school. Had the typical good looks, nice square face and really built. He took steroids, and worked out everyday in his basement

Coming to the party at the trolley bed tonight? Someone else chimed in, “Kim’s mom is home this weekend, so we’re partying outside.” I walked down this little path to a spot where someone had a tree fort built, but there wasn’t any tree, just this pile of wood made into two rooms on the ground.

I ducked down and walked in. The usual crowd was all huddled in this wooden drinking pit. Guarding the door, or more likely staying near an exit was Billy, the 10 year old who out drink anyone in high school. His Dad had a mean temper, and often came looking for him. Billy always had a spot with quick exit. Tom, Scott, Dave and numerous guys all gave me a wink or nod as I walked in. Kim, Anne and the rest of the girls were in the back drinking Bartles & James. Wine coolers, why the hell does anyone drink wine coolers?

Tom looked like he needed to talk. I saw him glaring at Scott, but Scott was in beer induced oblivion. I wandered over to Tom; “Hey, let’s walk.” As we walked away we got the usual cat-calls from the group. We walked away from the trolley bed and towards the

houses of the little complex he lived in. He didn't say anything until we got to the porch of his house. Sitting on the steps he started, "You know Anne and Scott are together now."

"Yeah, but Anne is not too happy at how he's wasted all the time. Plus, everyone has seen Scott eyeing other girls so not sure he's in love either."

He looked at the ground.

"Why don't you ask Anne to go out?"

He dug his foot in the dirt pile on the edge of the porch. "I can't! I'm Scott's best friend."

"Don't worry about him. I'll talk to Scott."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really. Let's head back and you go sit by Anne."

He looked up with a evil grin muttering "Thanks." "You know, I don't understand why I can talk to you. I mean all the guys say that. I mean its like talking to a guy except, " he didn't finish his sentence.

## **The Joke**

I smiled at him. "I hate to break the secret, but, Tom, all I do with any of the guys is talk about the girls they like or don't like. I feel like goddamn Dear Abby. How do I break up with Mary? How do I talk to Darleen?"

He laughed. "We all know, but no one says it. Does it bother you?"

"Well if you could get Anne to stop lectureing me on the use of birth control it would help. One day she is going to kidnap my ass and drag me too Planned Parenthood!"

"No way, she thinks you're doing it ...with all ...of us?!" The sentence stuttered out of him. "And like you'd risk getting pregnant? Man! That'd be really stupid."

“That is why I can’t say anything! Am I mad at her for believing I’m a slut, or a stupid slut?” We both laughed.

I continued, “Besides if I tell her the truth, well shit, then all the girls would know, and you guys would never date again.

Tom started to say something, but then didn’t. He looked at his sneakers putting his hand in his pocket.

Putting my hand on his shoulder I could feel something just hit home for him. Deep down they all really thought no one believed them, well not really.

“Listen Tom, we started this joke together. Trust me I’m having fun with this too.”

Lifting his head up a little, “Really?”

“Yeah really, come on, ok?” He half-smiled and nodded in agreement while still looking at the ground. “Besides, you know I’d rather talk to you guys anyways. It hasn’t really hurt my social life as you can tell.”

Reaching into his shirt pocket he handed me a cigarette while letting out a laugh.

“That’s true! That’s true.” With his head up high now, he turned to me, tilted his head and cocked one eye-brow questioningly.

In response I cocked one eyebrow and smiled an evil grin. He laughed and started untucking his shirt then put it backwards on inside out. I untucked just the back of my shirt. Both of giggling and laughing as we headed back to the party.

Stopping just before we got in view, “You know, it was really funny the first time, but why do we always do this?”

“Because, we keep thinking some day those fucking idiots will figure out it’s a joke and say something. Don’t worry you can tell Anne the truth when you start dating. And don’t forget to tell her to lay off the health class lecture too!”

My walks became fairly common. I was the little social counselor for the male members of our group. They always had some girl trouble. And of course after returning from our little heart to heart, it was easier to pretend like we did something sexual than admit they just wanted to talk about how they felt. For me, it was easier to play the slut, than answer questions why I didn’t have a steady boyfriend. The game continued and we had fun.

One of us would purposely leave a shirt slightly untucked, and watch people trying not to say anything. I never denied or confirmed anything, which of course led my friends to make up their own stories. The rumors and lies kept my “difference” a secret. And it let me bond with the guys, as their confidant, and pseudo sex partner, I belonged.

### **Finding Home**

My last year at junior high was starting to blur. Leaving the house for the weekend parties was now preceded by taking a few shots. Knowing it would take more than I wanted to admit to get my buzz rolling. My tolerance went up really fast as grades started to decline. Drinking went beyond the weekends and the parties, continuing into the week. At school my new friend's lockers each had various types of alcohol. As the blur thickened, I would forget what and where my classes were. Often heading in the wrong direction friends would flag me down and escort me into the correct classroom.

"Hey, what the hell you doing? Class is this way!"

I noticed I was becoming too attached to my female friends. I started flirting with them. I didn’t know why I did it, but I just did, and I couldn’t stop. My friends noticed it too. I tried to drown out the confusion with vodka and boys. I went through many brief moments with boys, but found no matter how drunk I was something was dead wrong.

I kept telling myself this is sex. I am a teenager. It is suppose to be awkward. No matter the guy, or how much alcohol, I just found myself completely not attracted, and turned off. Instead, I kept eyeing the girls in our group. I didn't want to believe it, refused to name it, and was having a hard time hiding it.

My best friend, Alison tried to have a serious talk with me. She pulled me aside and said, "You're Gay." Yeah no problem I'm drunk almost every day and can't find my classrooms, but oh we need to talk about me being Gay? I was hurt, afraid, and mostly angry. All my fear and rage lashed out at my best friend.

Mad at what she said; mad because she was dating this guy. I was even madder that her dating someone bothered me. After our talk I drank more than ever. Late at night I'd head off for long walks after the parties broke up. I never wanted to go back to my house. I'd follow the street lights, only problem is my street had no street lights.

Sometime after midnight or 1am I'd reach a corner store, pick up the pay phone and start dialing. I never said who I was but my voice gave me away. The next morning my friends told me I freaked them out by some wild story. Couple times I even said someone had died, causing a flurry of late night calls among the group. But mostly I'd just ramble on senselessly, never remembering what I said. At the end of every phone call I would always ask the same question they told me. I'd ask, "Hey, ahh ...like how do I get home?"

They never really understood the question.

### **Why do they call you Jim?**

Finally that year ended, I was going to leave junior high, and enter the high school. After too many late night drunken phone calls and too many conversations with Alison, I began to distance myself from my junior high friends that summer. Maybe they

distanced themselves from me? Either way no one seemed to be concerned I wasn't around. I found a cover in a group of burnouts at Raine's.

Raine was the older sister of, Dom, a guy dating my younger sister. I was at Dom's house one day, met Raine, his slightly older sister, and we hit it off. As her friend I was welcomed into the group. The group seemed to focus around Raine's house since the main guys were Raine's older brother, and her boyfriend who was her older brother's good friend. Those two and their friends, mostly high school guys, and their very temporary girlfriends were the burnouts. Around the burnouts was a perfect setting where I could hide, and not get into any trouble. Not many girls, and all were attached to some guy including Raine, who was either glued to her boyfriend or absent.

Raine's house was filled with people in the living room, bongs in the fridge, and alcohol in mass quantities. No one bothered with me, no one tried to determine my name never mind my sexual identity. Very few people except Raine even talked to me. I was the weird chick in the corner singing Doors tunes. The chick with no name, that sat next to a bottle of Bacardi.

Hey Jim what you ordering? Oh shit, flash back to now. I looked at an annoyed, but cute, waitress, "bagel, toasted, no creme cheese. "

I turned to Cindy. You've never heard me speak before? Not outside, she replied. I just swore your voice was way higher. Someone chimed in, when you're screaming everyone's voice gets higher. Plus she's had about 2 hours sleep.

Is that why people call you Jim?

It was the summer before high school. One night in the cornfield behind Raine's house, I was smoking and singing quietly, or so I thought, and this girl came up and kissed me. She just stared at me and said, "It's Jim Morrison, I just kissed Jim Morrison."

Everyone laughed, but she just sat right down next to me watching me sing. The name

stuck. From then on I was the girl called Jim. For some reason all the older boy's temporary girlfriends remembered my name, and called me Jim everytime they saw me. They liked Jim. Jim was cool. Jim didn't seem to have any gender. Jim was someone the guys could talk to and the girls could hang on with out worry. Most of them never learned my real name, and I wasn't about to correct them.

### **Gender Bending 101**

This was my escape. I had a daily ritual that summer. I'd get up and head for Raine's in the morning. She'd greet me with a breakfast of hotdog rolls, and the status on whether or not her mom would be home. I hung with Raine until her boyfriend showed up and they went out to party. They let me stay behind in the house to direct anyone popping in late to the night's party spot. Often I sat in her house alone or with her older brother's friends, until they too took off for some party. Not sure why they let me hang at their house so much. Maybe they knew I hated being at my own house. My parents were fighting all the time, and it was better if I was out of the way. Raine's parents were already divorced, maybe her and her brother just understood. We never talked about it.

Late at night, Raine would come home, and I'd still be there. She'd always ask me to stay until she fell asleep. She'd get ready for bed and come back out with sleepy clothers on and sit on the couch in living room with me. We'd listen to her favorite Journey, or Barbara Striesand album, smoke a few cigarettes and then I'd head home. I spent my days watching her friends try to score some weed and set up the night's party. It seemed like half the school popped in at some time. Everyone would just hang out at Raine's. Hey if Raine wasn't home, Jim might be there. Jim was good for a few laughs until Raine or her older brother came home. Bonus, her mother was never home. Rumor had it her mother checked her self into the Psych Center on the weekends.

Jim, how did you get the name? Jim? I must start getting more sleep; Cindy was intruding on my memory. I looked up; apparently I had been staring into my coffee a bit

too long. “Oh some drunken girl named Tina thought I looked like Jim Morrison. She started making fun of me, and then called me Jim. The guys thought it was mean, but Tina’s friend thought it was funny as hell, so it stuck. “

“Why did you let them tease you?,” Cindy added trying to understand.

I didn’t feel like trying to explain how then gender factor entered in, and how it gave me a safe zone for a while. Honestly, I’m not sure I understood. Instead I just replied with a joke like usual.

“I don’t know, I guess Jim was better than not having any name. It grew on me. It’s better than “butthead,” I said pointing to my best friend who had been dubbed butthead, boho, and little butt since I’ve known her.

“So did you do a lot of drugs? I mean how did you get such a low voice?” My friend glared at her, and told her to drop it.

“No it’s ok. I’m used to it.”

I looked back to answer the question. No, matter fact I’ve done very few drugs, but no one seems to notice. They just accuse me of what my friends at the time did. Guilt by association I guess.

Cindy looked at me in disbelief. “What?!”

“See, no one believes me,” I smiled.

I rattled off like a broken record, “I’ve seen what drugs can do and I’m not interested. I have no tattoos, I don’t own a motorcycle, and I’ve never done anything more than a little pot.”

I leaned back and looked out the window. When will I move away from here? God I hate this town.

The memory came rushing back.

Raine stumbled home and went into the kitchen.

### **Running and Screaming**

Before I could see what she was up to, she flew through the living room waving a knife. Running, and screaming. Shit, she's suicidal! I chased her. She was chasing after something, or fighting. I chased her round the house until she fell over the couch and dropped the knife. "Ok, are we done now?" She turned to me and looked right through me, then bolted for the bathroom. She locked herself in.

I went and put the knife away, and she started banging away in there. "What the fuck! She banged against the door screaming, "They're everywhere!" "Get them, make them stop"

"Let me in you idiot, you locked the door!" I hate her when she comes down, but usually she's just moody and shit but this is bad. I mean this is really bad. After yelling back a forth a bit she finally stopped banging against the door, and let me in.

Now what happens next I'm not sure if I remember or dreamt it or what? Maybe I made this all up but I'll never forget it.

As the door swung open she ran and huddled next to the toilet slamming the floor and everywhere with hands yelling, "Get it, stop! Get it, there! I grabbed a hair brush off the floor, and banged the walls and the floors with her. Then she stopped and just pointed and I'm not sure why but I just started banging the brush everywhere she pointed. "See that, see that?" BANG! "You missed!"

“Over there, see that?”

“Yes,” I’d scream banging what ever it was with my brush. After each hit telling her I got them. She grabbed me. Her nails dug into in my shoulder. Something was scaring the shit out of her and I wasn’t feeling to great myself. The screaming!! She kept screaming, “You missed!” But I just kept wailing away screaming back, “No, I got that one”

You missed

No I didn’t

That one

I got it

No again

Then an idea hit me. The next time she pointed I said, “No I already got him see he’s not moving anymore”

“That one!”

“No he’s dead!”

I started to lower my voice adding, “Look they’re leaving. They’re going away. “I never knew what they were, but they were her monsters. I had my own and could only imagine what hers were. She laid still shaking and crying on the floor. The tile floor was cold. The toilet was cold. I remember hearing the faucet dripping. There weren’t any other sounds in the house but the drip dripping of the faucet, and her stuttered breathing. I held her until she was ready to move, and then put her to bed.

I walked home with the scene playing in my head over and over. When I woke up, I had forgotten. This is where I’m not sure if any of this happened. Raine did drugs, shrooms, acid, the lot, but never came down like that. On bad nights she’d cry, talk a lot then crash mid sentence, but never, never like that.

The sun was out and peaking around the peach colored curtains of my room. Wandering down stairs, everything was quiet. The morning coffee was already hours old. I grabbed a cup and stuck it in the micro with a beep beep beep. The microwave oven, best invention since cigarettes, I thought sitting on the couch.

Sitting with my coffee in the morning chill I grabbed the afghan. Does anyone make afghans anymore? My grandmother loved to crotchet, so our family and all my cousins had dozens of these scratchy ass blankets around. This one was in perfect '70s browns and oranges, creating a burnt umber hue from a distance. Pulling the blanket up, it scratched and hit a sore spot on my arm. OUCH! Pulling up my sleeve I saw a bruise in the shape of a little hand. A little hand with scratches for nails, scratches dug in deep. I never went back to her house again.

## **Burnouts**

September finally rolled around, and high school was starting. My friends passing from junior high to high school with me were surprised at how many high school guys already knew me. Many of their older brothers who barely looked at me last year, we're saying hi to me. The guys were saying hi and the high school girls were calling me by name, Jim. Knowing older guys was sketchy enough, but these guys were burnouts.

A burnout was dumb and only interested in getting high. Most were failing school, often stoned in class and basically losers going no where. Burnouts kept their younger brothers and sisters out of the group for fear they'd narc to their parents. Now that the high school burnouts knew me, I was in trouble. The only way freshman entered the burnouts was by bringing the drugs or sleeping with an older guy.

I tried to explain I met them through one of my friend's older sister who was barely a year older than me. My friends fired back that too many referred to me directly, by name. The occasional freshman at those parties was only tolerated, and most certainly

not remembered. I wasn't about to say I wasn't even at the parties half the time, just sitting in an empty house. Trying like hell to stay away from people, because I had started to flirt with girl. How could I explain I liked knowing the few girls around me had boyfriends that'd kick my ass if I did something stupid? And no way could I explain how the girls flirted with me, with Jim, and some how it felt right. No, I wasn't going to say any of that so I stopped trying to explain.

Like any high school, rumor filled in the spaces. Depending on who was talking I had slept with half the senior class or was now a dealer. Some added that I was strung out on acid and heroine. Yes, heroine. I didn't like the rumors but wasn't about to say what I really felt. Why I was really in the group. I liked being Jim. Before September was over, many of my friends from junior high started to avoid me.

One of the first days at High School I ran into, June, a best friend from grade school. She had attended a different junior high school, in a different part of town. The past summer she hung out with her older cousins at burnout parties herself. Just like me she was losing her junior high friends due to rumors. We kind of bonded since we had no other friends talking to us.

We became best friends in almost no time. But again, the feelings were taking over. I remember looking in the mirror asking, "What are you doing?" I was god dam flirting with her! What was wrong with me? It's going to happen. Looking myself in the eye thinking I could talk myself out of it, "You are going to lose another friend if you keep this up!!" Then something happened, I kissed her.

### **She kissed back.**

She kissed back.

In a few weeks we became girlfriends. I could go on about how we fell in love and the first touches and first kisses, but you've read that one before.

I asked her to dump her boy friend and be my girlfriend exclusively. She cried. Said she had been waiting for me to ask her since the night we first kissed. I gave her the only ring I had, an ugly as sin turquoise ring my grandmother gave me. I gave it to her with all my heart and I meant it. That night her and I became "us." We were both fifteen years old. Maybe she was 14, I liked them younger even then. We didn't have to wonder what others would think, and agreed to tell no one.

I had a difficult time understanding my feelings toward women in general, until this time. Once I realized the feelings I had could be mutual, I stopped trying to define my feelings. I now felt no need to define myself. I was finally happy and nothing else mattered.

It was not until we had dated for several months that I was able to define myself as Gay. June told me she had many doubts. She wondered if what we were doing was right. She did some research at the school library, but she said what she found was either damn scary, or useless.

Now the only trouble was the rest of the world. I scrawled "you and I against the world" at the end every note I wrote her.

### **The Talk**

June was afraid of the talk. The talk, as we called it, refers to the various rumors about me and drugs, me and boys and just me in general. Most of the talk stemmed from my not being very feminine or hanging around boys too much. The taunts of being called a tomboy never died, and now in high school being a tomboy had become a negative. My gender bending prompted rumors of being Gay. I mostly ignored the talk since until recently it wasn't true, and my friends defended me.

My sister was the first person to confront me directly about the talk. We had a weird relationship, not really blood related but some how we connected. We didn't have a lot in common but I stood up to those who tried to physically bully her, and she stood up to those who tried to verbally bully me. I could count on my sister to stick up for me when people started spreading rumors.

She was barely 2 years younger than me but looked older since she still wore make-up. I gave up wearing make-up right after my mom found out and said I could wear it. It was just what everyone did. We'd hide our make-up then put it on in secret on the bus, and take it off on the way home. Once my mom said it was ok it wasn't any fun. Besides being 13 and not having a job meant shoplifting your make-up. I never actually did the stealing. We had a friend that was amazing at it. She stole all our makeup, walk in with a little purse and come out with everything from Revlon, and Mabeline.

This afternoon I was walking on her street, and she comes rushing out the door and running up to me. Crying, she could barely talk, asking me if I was all right. It took her a few minutes all sniffing and dripping before audible words came out.

I'm ok, I repeated over and over. What could make her upset? Maybe she started believing, maybe someone saw me and June. Finally through her tears she began...

Linda told me, you spent the night in jail. Busted for drug dealing or something. Got beat up.

The story fragments poured out of her in rapid fire.

Cops came and handcuffed you. Beat the shit out of you. You were high and resisting arrest. I asked Linda where they'd taken you to, and and and ... and then Mel said she heard you, heard you, that you OD'd, and spent the weekend in the hospital. Where've you been? Your parents said you were at a friends house, but no one said they'd seen you all weekend. I called everyone.

I stumbled back almost falling over as I was hearing this. All I could mutter was a staccato, “WH Wh wh at?”

I was away all weekend, a rare event. We saw each other practically all every day, and this was the first time she didn't know where I was all weekend. Fumbling for what to say all I could respond with was to tell her Mel and Linda are assholes. I told her they didn't know what they were talking about. She grabbed my hands and turned them palm up to look at my wrists.

What are you doing looking for track marks? They'd be up here if you must know.

No, looking for handcuff marks. Linda said all handcuffs leave marks on your wrists.

How the fuck would SHE know? You believe this?

After I passed her inspection, apparently not showing any signs of arrest she calmed down. I wanted to ask, so many things, but stayed quiet afraid of what she might ask in return. Spending the weekend with my new girlfriend was not an answer either of us were prepared to hear, aloud.

That summer at Raine's gave me more of a reputation than I expected. I never told her where I went that weekend, and we dropped it. Our friendship survived this confrontation. Of all things, to be called a burnout while images of Raine in the bathroom that night still scared me awake.

I accepted the drug rap since that was easier than telling the truth.

## Family

Jim where are you? Cindy knocked me back. I know you only bought coffee but we're still short?

Oh sorry, yeah here. I threw down a 5 with "Gay Money" stamped on it.

Look at that! Said Little Butt. "You're so queer."

"Shuddap, yeah it didn't bother you so much when we were dating now did it?"

Dating? Ok we kind of dated for about, I don't know, a week maybe? Strange about Gay relationships, especially when you first enter the community many dykes confuse a friend for a girl friend. It's like we are all 8 years old starting this whole dating dance from the start. Stepping on each other's toes, and not really getting to know our partners. So many dykes are so immature, and I think it's because now at the age of 20, 30, 40 or more they are just starting to feel what it's like to have a connection with someone.

Often even at 30 they fall into the Romeo and Juliet idea that heteros go through in grade school or junior high. Every relationship is forever, someone you'd die for and "the one love." The rest of the world has all of high school and college to date, fall in love, get dumped and get over it. Dykes seem to miss that and get all caught up in the first person they relate too and happens to be attractive.

This town being so conservative is saturated with immature women looking for "the one." Worse, they find the one in about an hour, move in and wonder why they're miserable a month later. Unable to distinguish a mentor, a friend, or a family member from a lover they constantly cause so much drama. I'm so glad I went through it in high school instead of now.

Where did the time go? A few more months of this and I'll be out of here. Ok, I didn't get accepted to Berkeley, but University of San Francisco is still on the West coast. It's still 3,000 miles from here, from my family. Well, my real biological family. Then again, I've always been piecing together little families from my friends. I had a younger sister, brothers, and an older sister, but I don't talk to any of them anymore.

It was a beautiful Sunday morning. I love Sundays in the summer. No school on Monday just makes the weekend even sweeter. I could see the light trying to squint around the shades into my bedroom.

My room was actually pretty cool at this time of the morning. Jim Morrison was sneering drunkenly at me from my closet door. Billy Squire and Eddie Van Halen trading riffs over my dresser mirror. Most importantly it was dark enough you couldn't see all the damn hand painted flowers on the dresser. The darkness made the peach colored walls look more burnt umber. Burnt umber always was my favorite color in the box of colored pencils in art class, burning embers, no fire, just fuel.

Mom must have gotten an idea that if she over feminized my room some how I would grow out of being such the tomboy faster? I can't blame her she always wanted a daughter. She wanted the little girl you took to dance recitals and helped pick out the right color eye shadow. Instead she got me, a not particularly pretty little child. I traded my budget Barbie camper in for GI Joe's Kung Fu grip the first time I found the "boy's side" of K\*B Toys.

I leaned over and looked at the clock, 10am. My sister would already be up, and I'll be late. After what happened the last weekend I wasn't around... I pulled open the shade, and the room filled with an orange light. I watched the dust in the room dance and mingle then through the ray of light. The dust always looked so weird in the morning. Everything looks different with morning eyes. Yes, it was going to be a good day.

I hopped in the shower, got dressed, and grabbed a pop tart as I ran out the door. I was supposed to meet my sister over at Dan's house. Dan was my best friend. In all senses of the word he was my brother. Dan some how got it. I wasn't the type of girl you dated. Later I wondered if maybe he was Gay since he never started to look at me that way. You know, when your best friend starts to realize he's a man and you're a woman. That awful awkward moment that means the end of a friendship. He wasn't Gay just smarter than most. Dan just knew I wasn't ... I wasn't... He knew I was his brother.

I walked through the back yards past my sister's house and into the street. I saw Linda walking up the hill towards me smirking. "Fuck you, too Linda." She turned her head and kept walking. Not far behind the bitch was my sister. I ran over to her, arms outstretched for the usual hug. She just stood there and stared.

I grabbed her arm. "Hey what's up, so I'm a few minutes late?"

"I'm not talking to you."

"What's wrong?"

She turned to walk past me. Just as she past I heard the hocking sound in her throat. I snapped my head around; to feel spit hitting the side of my head. I caught her eye, for a second. She looked scared.

I started to speak, but she spat again in my hair.

"Hey, ok I'm late but." Before I could finish again I felt the spit find my forehead. "Hey I could kick the shit out of you, stop it!"

Again it hit, and ran down the top of my forehead.

"Sis, talk to me! What did I do?"

"I'm not your sister," she screamed without even looking at me.

As she tried to walk away I grabbed her arm. Part of me wanted to knock her into the next state, but then I saw Linda. "What did that bitch tell you this time?"

I didn't know it then, but what were going to be our last words to each other followed. I threw my hands in the air and my face to the ground and said rather calmly, "Just the say word and I'll never talk to you again."

I never looked up, but was grateful as I could sense her turning back around to face me. Then I felt her answer, smack and run down my cheek.

### **Test Results**

That night, I called June. My fingers crossed I asked, "Have you heard some drug story going around again?"

She said only two words, "the talk. " Wincing, I screamed "NO!" Shit she knows or at least has been told I'm a dyke. I didn't want to believe that was it, but I replayed the scene over, and over, and over in my head. (I still do). I tried to find another answer, any other answer, but Linda was there smiling. I didn't want to but I figured it out. If I was dealing drugs, a drug addict, that was ok, but I could not, and will never be forgiven for being a dyke.

Hers was the first confrontation, but it was not the last. At least I can say the reactions of my friends were honest. Some called me a dyke to my face, some behind my back, but I knew what they all thought. I have now learned to respect any honesty. I would much rather be openly hated than to have someone pretend to tolerate me. However, my parents had a different reaction.

I think my parents suspected I was Gay for longer then they're willing to admit. They wanted desparately to find a cause for my behavior, mannerisms, my maleness. Actually, I believe they were hoping for a cure.

The results of the test are not as important as what the tests told me about my parents. My mother said she was concerned about my deep voice. I went along with it, since I had already noticed my voice did seem to disturb others.

I was naive enough to think, maybe she was right. What if what I finally knew as happiness with my girlfriend was nothing more than a chemical imbalance? What if this Gay thing was a medical problem, not real, just a sickness of some sort. Mother never came out and said, we're doing the test because you are Gay, but we both knew.

The doctors came in and speaking to among each other, like I wasn't even there. It must have been a teaching hospital because not only did the doctor come in, but he was followed by no less than 5 other people all in white lab coats. He'd hold up my arm then focus on my hand. Five heads would all lean in and look at the hair on my knuckles, which until then I never noticed. He'd point something out they'd all look, then each of the 5 would take a turn staring, prodding and touching. They'd poke and touch without even a glance at me. No one asked to touch they just did. They checked out the muscles in my arms, back and stomach, then stared at my throat. Next they all examined my toes and my feet. Ever have 6 strangers touching and staring at your feet like you aren't even there? It's very disturbing. Of course I was asked a few questions which I could tell they were only concerned with the tone of my answer not my actual answers. As a spoke the doctors looked at each other passing knowing nods and looks.

The doctor asked if my voice ever cracked before it went deeper. I lied, and said no, but it did. It also did it again about a year after this exam. Now that I felt like a total freak in a side show they asked if I had any concerns. Uhm yeah like so is everything you stared at and nodded in agreement about wrong? I didn't say anything although I really wanted to ask these people in sterile white coats if this could affect my sexual orientation. Problem, I'm not sure sexual orientation was in my vocabulary yet. Maybe if it was one doctor I might have been able to ask something, but sitting there in a paper

dress, on a metal hospital bed suddenly veery aware of every hair on my body and the shape of my larynx I couldn't say anything.

Don't remember how long the wait was but I was extremely nervous waiting for the results. I had stomach aches, and headaches. I was happy to find out I was simply a female with a deep voice. My results were within normal ranges. This confirmed to me my feelings for my girlfriend were honest. I began to accept being Gay as something I had no control over. However, my parents were not relieved by the results. They became more agitated, as they were still looking for the cause of the Gayness.

## **Broken**

I always kept everyone at a distance. Not sure when, but I stopped hugging my parents very early, and grew very independent in a lot of ways. Probably about the time my being a tomboy was getting old. The conversations we did have starting centering and revolving around the same topics. I wasn't walking right, not dressing right, not being like all the other girls. The answers were the same. If I just tried to be more like a girl everything else would be ok.

I wasn't trying to be more like a boy just to piss them off, I just was. When puberty hit any questions I had, well, I already knew their answers so didn't bother to ask. The less they knew about how different I was becoming the better. They didn't need to know how much trouble I had trying to date guys, or about my crushes. What could they possibly have said? They knew I was losing friends, but how could I tell them the real reasons why? The distance kept us from fighting.

I really thought once the test proved my *difference* wasn't hormones they'd accept it. Whether my difference was being Gay, or not being quite so female, now they knew it was just me. I thought things would change. Instead we had more talks and whatever distance lay between us grew exponentially.

A few days after the test, I was riding home from some where with my father. We got in an argument and I have no idea how the topic came up, but I was trying to convince him homosexuality is a trait you are given at birth, and could not be altered. My discovery since the test results, but I really had no other facts to back it up. This was 1984 or 85 a few years before the disease category of homosexuality was removed from the DMS-III. Homosexuality was not officially removed until the DMS-III-**R**, the revised version of the DSM-III, released in 1987.<sup>2</sup> If I had known where to look, I wouldn't have found anything to back up my argument. My argument was based on what I had known and felt since I was about 3 years old. However, I couldn't add that to the discussion, since we weren't talking about me.

My father kept saying *it (homosexuality) was changeable*. My lame argument in return; "No. it's not." The strange part of the argument was that neither one of us was about to admit we were talking about me. We were just talking, or arguing nature versus nurture in relation to homosexuality. The average topic of discussion that pops up randomly between a father and a daughter; don't all fathers and daughters have such talks??

On went the argument back and forth with neither of us really having any facts. Finally, at a stoplight, he turned, looked at me and said, "You may think you're Gay when really, just your hormones are out of whack." As he spoke his eyes turned away. A freight train hit me in chest.

I wanted to say, but we just got the results, so it's not that since I'm still Gay, but I couldn't argue. Did he think I was now cured, or that he could just talk me out of being gay? I couldn't speak.

A long silenced passed then I finally got it. What he really said was the test was to find out what was wrong with me. The test and the argument with my father was the

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<sup>2</sup> Ask the Expert. Continuing Medical Education. (2001, May) *Homosexuality and DSM-IV*. Retrieved Dec 12, 2005 from <http://www.mhsource.com/expert/exp1052101c.html>

beginning of my parents expressing their homophobia. Instead of creating acceptance between us, we had more talks like the one with my father and whatever distance lay between us grew exponentially. My parents were trying to fix me; I was broken.

I got it; he needed to fix me, but I knew I was not fixable. That led to one conclusion. I was not only a failure at being a girl, but I was now morally unacceptable, inappropriate, unbecoming, unfit, unsuitable, and wrong.

### **Inquisition**

I could now never be “good enough,” I’d always be “broken.” I can not explain how I dealt with this, I just did. Or maybe I didn’t. Sometimes at night I walked by the old linen closet, took the towels off the third shelf and tried to remember what it was like to hide, I was never again going to fit in my favorite hiding spot, the closet.

The rumors continued to spread about me and June. As our relationship grew, we became less careful about our actions. I stopped hanging out with the burnouts, and we spent every weekend together, alone. Every year we’d changed our schedules in school so we could be in more classes together. The amount of time we were spending together only caused more talk. By the time we noticed that everyone else noticed it was too late. I hadn't gone on any walks with the boys in months and she had dumped her boyfriend. We thought there was a lot of talk before.

Can't remember how we got into it, but soon we were both in school counseling. I was sent to see school counselors for most of junior high. Why should this be any different? Accept now I was not sure I wanted to share my writings

We had separate counselors. I went at least once a week sometimes twice and then we both met for “Group” every Friday.

Mr. Wagner was chosen to look after me. He'd call my study hall and have me sent to his office a couple times a week. Mostly he'd ask me how school was, and benign things trying to build a rapport, and gain my trust. Wagner asked to see my notebooks, and I should have learned from my sexual identity experience not even a year earlier, but I handed over my notebooks. This counselor used the term Lesbian. It was the first time I had heard the word. I knew it but no one said it. Wagner used it towards me, accusingly. I've hated the word ever since.

My sessions with Wagner became a battle of intelligence against creativity. Just like in junior high, I side tracked him with stories of attempted suicide. He saw through my stories. Well, it was harder since I was actually quite happy with my life, and playing the moody brooding suicidal type was a bigger stretch now than a year ago.

I found out too late that he stopped trying to get me to talk and called my friends into his office. I was still seeing him, but little did I know my friends were called to his office separately at first then in groups to discuss my "problem." Yes, this was now the second time my friends were asked to discuss my problem to a counselor. Maybe they were ok with it before, but this time it changed everything.

Beyond the intrusion of my privacy, it alienated me from what few close friends I had. Here I was all happy but little did I know behind my back the man charged with helping and supporting me was not only spreading the talk, but confirming it. Whatever he said to my friends was much more damning than last time.

I did learn, in the beginning, my friends were unwilling to share, to talk, but over time this changed. To this day I have no idea exactly what was said in those sessions. All I can tell you about is the after affects.

### **Trying to be Cool**

At school the rules of "trying to be cool" took over. I spent my A period lunch in the smoking area outside. Why? The few friends I had weren't in my lunch period. Some

dumb suburban high school rule, you can still be cool if you hang outside smoking alone, but eating alone was total banishment to geekdom. Some big kid who played guitar named Tony, and a short kid from Texas with a heavy Southern accent were my friends. We smoked about 6 cigarettes in those 48 minutes making fun of the kid from Texas, who insisted on wearing a cowboy hat and a nasty-ass long beard. Tony said he was the evil step-child of ZZ-Top.

I met Tony one of the first days I wandered out for a cigarette. None of his friends had the same lunch either but he recognized me from Raine's house. Tony asked if I was still dating this guy, said he was in a band with him or something. I told him no, and we both laughed at what a loser he was. That was enough of a bound to decide to hang together during lunch.

One day the guy I dated walked out briefly into the smoking area. It was pretty common for people to sneak out during the lunch periods. It's less risking to have a butt out here than in the bathrooms. He always wore a floppy leather hat, fringed leather jacket and walked around acting like he was some renaissance man. We never really dated or broke up, but people thought we were a couple. Our unspoken rule was if one of us was at a party and the other showed up you left whoever you were hanging with and we'd hang together. What happened any other time, we didn't discuss.

As he walked out we exchanged polite head nods followed by, "Hey." After he left, me and Tony just looked at each other and laughed.

Tony started, "Why does he wear that stupid hat? Man, I remember seeing you two together a couple times over at Raine's. You two together just seemed, I don't know, like wrong."

Getting nervous at where this might be heading I defended, "What was so funny? Everyone said we looked cute together."

“I don’t know, I mean he just was, ya know. How did you guys meet?”

“I was good friends with Raine.” Nodding in agreement Tony added, “Yeah, you two were tight all that summer.”

“Well, he was good friends with Raine’s boyfriend, you know how that goes.” Hoping I could side track the conversation, I added “He’s dating some preppy chick now I heard.”

I don’t know man, it just felt wrong seeing you two. I mean, well you know he thought he was like the next Jim Morrison and shit right?

Hmmm, no, we never really talked.

We both sheepishly laughed at my obvious innuendo. Phew, my cover hasn’t been broken.

Laughing while trying to talk, he continued. “Come on! Everyone knew you were JIM, not him. So, like he was dating *The Jim*. It was like seeing two guys together or something I mean ...

Tony started to stumble over what he just said, “I mean I know you’re not a guy but it was like he was.. Oh fuck I don’t know. It was just weird!” I continued to laugh like it was all still a big joke, but I knew what he meant. A lot of people thought of me as male.

Finally Tony ended this awkward moment with, “Well whatever he’s a dick, I’m glad you’re not dating him. You’re too cool for him.”

Tony was starting to look nervous but I shot him a quick smile before looking down and tossing my cigarette to the ground. As I looked up again I spotted Anne, and quickly excused myself.

## **I Can't be seen with You**

I had forgotten Anne just got switched to A lunch. "Where you been? Hey let's sit together tomorrow." She wouldn't even stop walking to talk to me. She looked over her shoulder half whispering, "people are talking." As we approached the entrance to the cafeteria she stopped herself short, and pointed to a table of girls. They were the rich girls, easily spotted by three full layers of preppiness, heads of hair boofed out with too much hair spray, and adorned with expensive diamond earrings.

"Those girls over there, my new friends, they're all rich and ride horses in shows and shit. You know I'm into horses. I'd see them at the shows all the time. A year ago they wouldn't have talked to me. You see the dark haired one? Do you even know who she is? I mean like, they're popular and...."

I interrupted, "Well introduce me? I won't sit with you all the time, how about just.."

"No! God, don't you get it?"

"Fine, sit with them. Can't you sit with me and Tony once and while?"

"Listen, I can't be seen with you anymore, you have to understand. I mean what is this "Jim" shit? Why are girls calling you fucking Jim?"

She stopped, and looked down, and then she started again. "You know what they are saying. I just can't hang with you now. I don't want them talking about me too!"

Before I could say anything she walked away, quickly. I just stood there. How could I dodge the bullet with Tony, who I barely knew, but now one of my best friends was ditching me?

That Shit about You

About a week after my fall out with Anne, Raine popped out onto the smoking dock. I was talking to Tony and Raine skidding over to us lighting a cigarette. My heart dropped. I hadn't seen her in what felt like years.

"HEY JIM, ohmigod I have to tell you," she said almost as one single word dragging me off away from Tony. Glancing at the time stamp on the yellow hall pass, "I only have a few minutes. Did you hear about Anne yet?" I shook my head in a no fashion.

"Ok, I'm at outside Sharkey's having a smoke and I see Anne. So, I tell her I haven't seen you like forever, and asked what was up with you. Then Jim man, she went fucking Linda Blair on me. Said you're dating a girl in the school, maybe even a couple of them, calling you a dyke and shit. I told her no way and to shup up or I'll kick her ass."

"I go inside and find out she's been saying shit to everyone. I ran back out and she said I was only sticking up for you because we were doing it too. That was it Jim, I beat the shit out of her! Everyone came out and was cheering and, and I showed her. "

I took a long drag off my cigarette.

"I told her and everyone there I'd seen you with guys. You practically lived at my house that summer with, with guys." She said the words "with guys" like it was some kind of personal anthem. "I couldn't let her say that shit about you. She was telling everyone you're a dyke! Don't worry, Jim, I know you're not a dyke, how gross! That is just so gross!"

She's just pissed her brother is dating this rich bitch who tells her off all the time. Anne can't get into any of the parties that her brother is at anymore. Hey, where've you been, Jim? We miss having our own personal rock God at the parties. Call me, Shit I better go, I can't be late for Mr. Stokes' History class. Did you know he cries everytime Reagan is on TV? I mean he like told us that! What a rag!"

Who was the better friend I thought. Anne for believing I was what I was, or Raine, for thinking so highly of me and sticking up for me. It wasn't long after this Raine made the same choice as Anne. Anne was right, if Raine continued to defend me, people would talk about her too.

### **Casanova**

I was becoming quite the Casanova, at least in rumor. Almost any girl that gave me the time of day was rumored to be my latest conquest. I even had guys coming up to me saying they thought it was cool. They'd say something like they didn't care about all the stuff people were saying about me. Tell me they thought I was cool. Look away for a second, then quietly ask, "so how many babes you doing?"

Tom the "guy" I helped hook up with Anne. He asked me to set up a three way. We used to joke around a lot, so I was sure he wasn't serious. I just smirked and informed him Anne stopped speaking to me weeks ago. He said, "Who said anything about Anne. I was thinking of that girl in your sociology class. I know you're doing her, I saw her looking at you in study hall. Come on whatcha say?"

"Fuck off."

"Come on! I thought we were friends. I won't say anything."

"Listen Tom... "I hesitated. What if he is ok with it? Then I remembered every guys dream, 2 girls all hot just waiting for a man to finish them. "Fuck off."

In less than one year, I went from being pretty popular, to the school freak. At the very start of high school I knew everyone from freshman to seniors. I went to parties with the burnouts, and my phone used to ring off the hook every Friday night. I always had a number of parties to go to every weekend, a number people to see. Everyone wanted their own personal Rock god at their party. Everyone liked a girl named Jim. Less than

6 months later, I sat and stared at the phone. I had to make the phone calls. No one was ever home.

I'm more than OK with it

The next summer me and my girlfriend were having trouble. All this pressure of a "different relationship," and now we started losing all our friends. We decided we wanted our social lives back, and spent less time together. I would meet some kids in Valley Dale, a neighborhood not too far from my own, where Tom lived. Most of them went to private schools or weren't in high school yet. The main focus of this group was drinking. I also started my little walks with the boys again. Just like before, I let people think what they wanted and so did my male friends so all worked out

June began to hang out with her older cousins and their friends. Her cousins remembered me from the parties of previous summer, and knew a few guys I had "dated." If I was straight then no one questioned June either. Soon the cousins started trying to fix her up. She went along with it, a little more "along with it" than I knew. Unlike me, she didn't play the game, she was dating guys. Hoping I would not find out. But I did.

After being of being some demon lesbian corrupting little straight girls for a year and now hearing my girlfriend was dating guys, I was becoming a mess. I desperately needed someone to talk to, and didn't know what to do.

I started saying more than I should to, Kara, a girl from Valley Dale. School would be starting soon and she was transferring from an all girls Catholic school back to public school. We'd become close, and I didn't want her to ditch our friendship after hearing "the talk" from some one else. I'd give her the opportunity to have us mutually agree it was best to end it here. Shit, it was like breaking up or something.

"Kara, listen, I should tell you something."

She looked up then down like she wasn't even listening.

"We've been hanging out a lot, and, I don't want you to start off your first year at High School with a bad rep." Unsure of how to continue I stalled by pulling out a cigarette. She just sat there staring at a crack in the pavement. "I mean you might want to consider blowing me off, and I'll totally understand."

"What? You're talking crazy, just relax. I'm not going to stop talking to you just because ..."

I cut her short, "Damn it Kara, you've been going to that private school so you don't know. Listen, if you hang around me people will talk. And trust me you won't like what they'll be saying about you. Next thing you know, nobody will talk to you."

"Stop" She grabbed my arm and said "No, it's going to be OK."

"No, I mean they are going to say some pretty nasty things about you, about you and me."

"No, you, me, and June," she looked at me, smiled, and laughed. "People are probably already talking."

"So, you are, like, ok with it?"

"I'm more than ok, with it"

I think that was my first experience of coming out, instead of being outed.

### **Hostile Counselor**

My sessions with Mr. Wagner began to grow amusing. He kept attempting to get me to admit my "problem." I didn't. However, June was not having the same luck.

I was sitting in study hall when we heard a knock at the door. The study hall proctor was my gym teacher. There were even rumors about me with her. She got up to answer the door and then looked right at me. She had a strange look on her face. I looked at my watch, 2pm, Thursday. I'm not missing any appointments. Why is the teacher looking at me? If it was another teacher at the door, or I was in trouble they'd be calling my ass out. It took a few minutes for it to come together. I studied my teacher's face, she looked concerned, deeply concerned. I realized it can't be another teacher, and then I ran to the door.

The teacher didn't let anyone in, but cracked the door just enough for us both to walk out without the other students seeing who was at the door. She shut the door behind us. A chorus of "ooooohs" came from the classroom, as everyone thought I must be in really big trouble. There was June, crying, and she had make up running all down her face.

The teacher was trying to get her to explain but she could barely talk, or breathe. The teacher looked at me, and I took June in my arms and we walked away. The teacher just nodded and went back in the room.

I took her to the nearest bathroom, and kept asking her who did this to her. When she finally calmed down a bit, she could only say one word, "Linder." Dr. Linder was her counselor.

If she left a session something was wrong, something had gone horribly wrong! For her to get up and leave mid session; she'd never do that. What the hell did he say to her?

I flew into a rage. I didn't even know what he did yet, but I was ready to kill him. I started to head out towards his office but she held me back and dragged me into the bathroom.

"Wait, wait just sit with me!" she cried. "You'll only make it worse. We need to... we.. he..." she sighed. She stopped and we both just sat silent for a long time. After a cigarette or two she talked me into going for a walk instead of storming Linder's office. Now she had to calm me down, before she could tell me what happened.

Today Linder had spent the entire session asking her to admit her relationship with me was sexual. I knew he had been coercing her for the past couple weeks, but I kept telling her to change the subject. Today he cornered her in his office, putting his chair between her and the door. Then he just kept repeating one question over and over. "Is your relationship sexual?" She said she felt trapped. She told me the week before he started asking, if I was forcing her into something she was uncomfortable with.

No clue what he thought he was doing. What he was doing was scaring her to death. She was afraid he was threatening to tell her parents.

June just kept denying everything, but this week he started to call the sessions daily not just weekly. Day after day she would sit down, and he would just keep asking "Is your relationship sexual?" She would say no, but he would just keep asking, and asking if I'm forcing her. Today, the fourth day of this she started crying. Today he put himself between her and door and asked again, and again until she gave up. She quietly said, "Yes." At that triumph he forgot himself and stood up and moved from away from the door. She pushed him out of the way ran out of the room.

"I felt like he was interrogating me," she cried. Why is he doing this? I had no answer only that Wagner was doing the same to me. I told her I felt like he wanted me to admit to a crime, but he nevered locked me in the office.

I told her I refused to admit a thing, not when they were asking it like that. Admitting means you did something wrong, an admission of guilt. We have done nothing wrong. I repeated again grabbing by the arms looking into her eyes, "We have done nothing

wrong.” I’m not sure she believed me. All I saw looking back at me was fear. We skipped all further sessions after that day hiding in the resource room, where our group counseling took place, or the bathroom.

The thing that bothered us the most was Dr. Linders emphasis on the "sexual." He refused to accept the relationship as mutual, loving, and natural. In other words he refused to accept it as a relationship. Linders fully believed I was forcing her. He would not believe she was with me voluntarily. This did wonders for my mental and emotional state. I tried to justify how one could think this way. The best I could come up with was I was more masculine and they assumed I was forcing this pretty little girl into an unnatural situation.

I knew the relationship was mutual. June was free to break it off at any time and so was I. We had long, all night, discussions about whether we were comfortable with our relationship. We both agreed the relationship was what we wanted. I could not believe how hard it was to get where we were, to accept ourselves, and now I might have to try and explain it to a third person. How do I explain to a hostile counselor who obviously knew less about being Gay than I. I still barely 16.

### **The Couch**

Spending time in the resource room was a nice break from school life in general. The idea behind the resource room was to provide academic and emotional support for students with "special needs." Usually kids failing classes had trouble at home, or some emotional issue. The resource room attempted to address both issues. Students were assigned to the resource room during study halls to see tutors, and sometimes for group on Friday. The room had a back area with a couch where group was held. It was common for students assigned to the resource room, to use the room during any free period. It was made to help you feel comfortable; you could do your home work on the couch or listen to headsets. Many preferred the room's atmosphere to a study hall so it

was not a big shock when we started being there a lot. Although I was technically not in tutoring, but no one seemed to notice. Abigail could have made me leave.

Abigail was in charge of the resource room, and ran the group sessions. Unlike the other adults in school she used her first name as a way of "connecting" with us. She knew we were hiding from the other counselors, and seemed not only comfortable with us, but appeared to be protecting us.

Group started with a vow to keep everything said during group with in only the group. Unlike Dr. Linder, and Mr. Wagner's conduct, I thought this illustrated a respect for privacy. About eight of us attended group. The discussions usually started with Abigail asking if anyone had anything to say, and continued from there. The discussions centered on school stress, and parents. Mine and June's "problem" was never discussed. Abigail didn't consider it a problem. This alone made me feel welcome for the first time since I walked into high school.

When we first started attending group we didn't want to look like a couple to the others, and never sat next to each other. I don't remember when, but at some point we always found the couch empty. This was weird because people always fought to get a spot on the couch. Now we would show up late and the couch would be empty. Three people usually sat on the couch during group, so it was especially strange when we were the only two gone and it was empty. At least one person should have snagged a spot on the couch. We thought maybe this was their way of silently saying, we recognize you as a couple.

June finally asked a couple of our friends what was up with the couch. Abigail told the group to let us sit together. Christine also said Abigail told everyone to be careful how they acted toward June when I was around.

I didn't believe that and had to approach Christine myself. We felt a bond with Christine since like us; her only wrong was being in a relationship the school thought was unhealthy. She lived with her boyfriend, a man 12 years older than her.

Christine, so what's the couch deal, how come no one's on it when we come in?

Naw man, freakin' Abigail said we had to let you guys sit together. Then she went on about how you have a time-bomb temper and we should all be careful how we treat June. I don't know it's kind of cool. You definitely have the whole resource room afraid of you. What did you do? I mean Ken pulled a gun on his Dad and they aren't afraid of him?

NO SHIT! What do you mean by "*time-bomb temper*?"

"You know, like you're a crazy person. If someone yells at June, you'll blow up and kill them. She really thinks you are going to seriously hurt someone if we say the wrong word." She stressed word, like even she couldn't believe a word would set anyone off.

"Ever notice her freeze if you talk?" She noticed I wasn't happy at hearing this so she added, "So, what's the word?" Now she was laughing, "Come on man, and tell me the magic word"

I half smiled back. We exchanged a few looks until now I was laughing. Poor Christine, her real crime was being more mature than even the fucking counselors. Looking at the ground I muttered, "Uhhh how about 'Dude?'"

She smirks, "Dude, so who you killing first? I mean, my math exam's in an hour, and if you have something against Mrs. Shaw?"

Glad for the change of subject I took the lead, "No way, she's awesome. If it weren't for her I would have failed math. She got me on honor roll last semester."

Ok, you're assigned to the rebo room, Dude, but you're on honor roll? What gives?

Remember I'm only here for "Group," not tutoring. I have all these issues you see.

She nods her head in agreement. "Yeah, just like my issues"

Exactly.

Christine cocks her head to one side, "What gives then? What did you do to make them think you'll go ape-shit? Did you beat some up when you were 7?"

Laughing I replied, "Well this kid did call me four-eyes in fourth grade and I gave him a bloody nose."

"You psycho-killer! They keep shit on record forever. They probably still think you're a dealer just like in junior high too. Are they still searching your locker every day?"

No, thank god! Do me a favor, please tell everyone Abigail's lost a screw and it's ok to sit on the couch again.

Sure thing, but she'll toss a hissy.

This sucked! I actually thought for a moment the seating arrangement was Abigail's attempt to express she accepted us. Not only did she not accept us, but like the other counselors, she talked to our friends behind our back! I was beyond pissed, but by now I was used things like this from adults, especially someone pretending to be your friend, to understand. I still don't trust anyone who calls themselves a counselor. I mean I really thought Abigail was different.

After I told June she didn't believe me. Abigail was one of her tutors and they'd become fairly tight I guess. I told June to leave it alone, what could she say except to lie some more. She trusted Abigail and approached her.

I was wrong. Abigail didn't lie, although maybe she should have. Abigail told June our studying in the back room made her uncomfortable. She was afraid of me, and how protective I was of June. Abigail said she was always afraid she or the group might provoke me. Maybe I should have had June ask Abigail what the magic word is.

That was it. The one place I felt accepted, the group with all the other school freaks was now turned against me. Not even me and June, just me. The school counselors had again gone behind our backs to discuss me, and my actions, with people who knew me. I stopped even considering their acts as attempts at saving poor June from my "corruption," but simply out to get me!

The Note

### **Teachers**

The hostile environment soon expanded beyond the circle of school counselors. It soon became evident that Dr. Linders did not keep June's admission to himself. I know Abigail was informed, which may explain for the "seating arrangement." School counselors are expected to consult each other, but are they to consult teachers?

June and me had art classes together. We were decent students, and did our work without any trouble; except maybe talking too much at times.

My drawing instructor knew me better than most of my other teachers. I spent extra time in her room working on projects. Just a pencil, kneaded erasure, and a radio was the perfect retreat. One day I happened to be the only student in the studio during a free

period. While we were sitting there, she asked me if something had happened. She was very vague and casual about it.

Not even looking up from my work I replied "Like what?"

Did something happen at home, or have you gotten in trouble? You don't have to tell me....

No.

She was quiet for a bit, then said quickly, "I thought so," and went back to grading papers.

This was weird. She knew my parents so why would she be asking me if something was up at home. I put my pencil down and looked up asking "Why do you ask? Did my parents say something?"

She got up and closed the door to the studio. There was a study hall across the way, the one I was suppose to be in right now.

She called me over to her desk, and talked in a low voice. Well, I didn't think much of it, and still don't, but a few weeks ago I got a note saying to "watch" you and June. It said to keep an eye on you and report anything.

The note didn't say why or even what to watch for. When I first got it I thought it was stupid and threw it out.

Ok, now I was interested. "Do you normally get little notes on students?"

Once in a while we'll get one if someone was caught with drugs. The note will be vague, but instructs us to send the student directly to the nurse if we suspect they are acting funny. She kind of laughed, and said "You know they mean "high."

Also, if there is a death in the family we might get a note so we know to let you go to see a counselor, or the nurse if you are, putting her fingers up to mark little quotes, "having trouble focusing."

But this note didn't have any of the usual key words. It said to keep a watch on you two, and to call the office immediately if we see anything.

"Damn, I've got no clue what it's about." Then I asked if I could come down here on Friday this week to work too. She looked at her calendar and informed me Dave and Kent would be working too, knowing they like to pick on me. Then she added, "They actually work when it's not class time." I nodded, "that's cool" She jotted a note on her calendar and wrote a pass for Friday.

My painting methods teacher did not ignore the warning.

Mrs. B, my painting methods teacher not only didn't ignore the note but left a note for a substitute filling in for her. At the start of the class, Dave and Kent were screwing around as usual. Dave was sitting on the potter's wheel. Yes, he was spinning around on the wheel in the corner. Kent was trying to get the wheel to spin really fast. We thought he was going to make Dave sick, but then he stops the wheel abruptly. This sent Dave flying across the room into the pile of scrap papers.

We laughed, but the substitute was not amused. She got everyone calmed downed, and after we'd been working quietly for a few minutes I asked to turn the radio on. Dave yelled some insult at me, and I yelled a familiar comment back. We'd been doing this back and forth in art classes since 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I don't even remember what was

said, it was a reflex, for both of us. The substitute yelled no, and took the radio off the shelf putting it defiantly on her desk.

As she sat down she pointed a finger at me. "I'm going to keep a close eye on you." The class laughed! Of all the people in the class to keep an eye on, I was least of the trouble makers. She held up a note as if it was a notification of power, "It says right..."

Before she could finish Dave ran across the studio and grabbed it from her and began reading.

*Please keep a close eye on ...he pointed at me and inserted some insult. Report to the office any strange behavior immediately.*

The substitute grabbed it back and pointed at me again, "Don't think I won't. I'm keeping notes on you."

Len, who sat across from me sat up, "You don't have to report Dave flying across the room, but you have to report her for asking to turn the radio on?" Again the class broke into laughter.

I grabbed Len and spoke under the noise, "Trust me, leave it alone!"

The whole class was now talking and laughing. They grabbed glances over at me in amazement, or astonishment, or maybe disgust. Len leaned in and whispered amid the laughter, "What is that about?"

I have no idea; Mrs. B hates me.

He faked a smile and moved uneasily in his chair. As if trying to convince himself he added, "Fuck she hates everyone, don't worry."

First the group, and now my art class, why was being persecuted, and separated from everyone and everything?

### **First Day as a Senior**

It wasn't long before I noticed many of my teachers were treating me differently. Maybe I just felt that way, but it seemed to be getting worse.

Junior year just had me spiraling into full on depression. By this time I did realize my temper was a problem, and decided to stop drinking. Things got a little out of control that summer, and I couldn't hide it. After I sobered from a not so quiet drunk we both sat back and thought this little bottle here just can't be helping. I didn't know about AA especially AA for under aged drinkers, but fortunately I had June. She put her foot down, and made me chose between the bottle and her. It probably saved my life especially considering I was now driving more too.

To help with the withdrawal, I started biking again. Once I got over 10 miles it got boring so I joined a gym. I still smoked, but switch to some light brand. Lifting weights really helped get some of the stress out of my system. I talked June into playing some basketball, with my old neighborhood friends, and we both entertained the thought of trying out for the team. We almost had forgotten how crappy school could be by the time September came rolling in.

Senior year, I was feeling better, in better shape, and had made friends with 2 older non-student women who were gay. Well, we never talked about it, but I was pretty sure they were. I was finally able to say I was Gay. Only took sleeping with another female for over a year for me to do it. Me, and June agreed to come out to them, we just didn't know how yet.

My first day as a senior went ok. I was getting more prepared to be out. We couldn't be totally out; both our parents had made it quite clear we'd be kicked out and disowned.

I didn't get to debate very long how I was going to be more out this year. It was probably the first week when some one yelled "dyke" at me in the hall. Later someone threw spit wads in my hair. I wasn't prepared for that. They were sophomores! Our high school only housed 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades since the school district was so big. The senior class alone was over 600 students and a small class at that. These sophomores shouldn't have even known me.

### **Segregation**

Me, and June had gym together as our last period class. I was psyched since a few friends from grade school were in our class. Also, a number of the cute cheerleaders were in our class.

The first day of gym always included assigning lockers. Everybody had their separate lockers, and they were distributed alphabetically. My last name is near the end of the alphabet so I sat and chatted with my friends from grade school. We both noticed all the lockers were predominantly in the same area. Every locker was one right after another in the back left hand corner by the office. Batchman -A114, Beacher -B116, Boyds C118, Christie-A124, Coyne-B126, Goffney-C128, this was very strange. Usually they spread us out using the whole locker room so everyone has plenty of space. Finally they called my name. The lockers were going in perfect order, until my name-C910. 910? June was directly after me, C914. As we walked up to get our locks, the gym teacher seemed uneasy. She couldn't look me in the eye as she handed me my lock.

The segregation was obvious. We were at the farthest spot from the rest of the class. A few girls started mumbling, but I couldn't bear to look who it was.

After class June went into the phys. Ed office and made a stink, asking why we were separated. I asked her not to, but she went anyway. I waited outside and could hear her yelling. All the instructors were in the office but I didn't hear any of them say anything. When she came out, June looked pissed. She said no one said anything.

As usual not willing to leave it alone June found Chris. They worked in the attendance office together that year and the year before. June knew Chris was sent to the phys Ed office while they were working that morning and came back acting funny. She must have heard something. After much prodding Chris said while she walked through the locker room towards the phys. Ed office, she saw 4 cheerleaders, the ones in our gym class, in the office yelling. She didn't hear it all but heard enough.

"We refuse to change in front of them!" said one voice.

Another echoed, "It's like having a guy in the locker room, especially Jim! I mean like, she is even called a guy's name. Do we really know if she's even female?"

A coaches voice interrupted, "Now calm down, you don't have to be insulting."

"No, no, but you've seen her during the President's Physical Fitness tests she is always way stronger than anyone, and what's up with that voice?"

Another voice added, "Can't you make them change somewhere else?"

By then Chris has heard enough and quickly delivered her folder and walked out. She knew who Jim was, everyone did.

Pink Cinderblock

After that we called the area where the straight girls changed the forbidden zone. I took every chance to walk through the forbidden zone I could.

Every so many weeks you'd sign up for a new class in gym. June really was pumped to try out for basketball so when basketball was offered for a session we both signed up. One of the last days of that session a number of girls were tired or hurt and wanted to sit out the last game. Sue, my grade school friend, and me were the only ones left on our team. The other team only had one girl so coach, Ms K, decided to substitute herself in and played us.

We played a good game and at the end we were tied. In the last seconds of the game I had the ball and was heading down court to the basket. I was setting up to shoot the winning point to break the tie, and coach threw her arms around me, in a bear hug so I couldn't throw. A second later the buzzer went off. She let go, and I fell to the floor laughing. I looked over and Sue and the other player were bent over laughing. Sue was trying to call foul, but couldn't stop laughing long enough.

Even those on the sidelines were all dying. It was the funniest thing to happen in gym class in a long time. Sue turned to help me up, saying how cool it was to have a teacher really get into the game. She asked if I was thinking of trying out this year.

I said I don't know if I'm good enough and we looked toward coach for an assessment of my skills, but she wasn't laughing. She was literally shaking, and apologizing profusely.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. That will never happen again. I don't know what I was thinking, I mean, I'm so sorry I... I... I..."

Me, and Sue had our arms extended moving towards her both still laughing and saying "it's ok, really it's ok." She jumped back from us in fear. She looked at the rest of the

class who were heading to the locker rooms already. Then her eye jumped back to me. "Are you ok? I'm sorry, that was wrong," she kept repeating.

"Yes, yes, I'm fine it was ..." I started to understand.

Sue kept on laughing and talking "It was great, the way you grabbed her, and stopped the shot. Can we practice that in?"

"NO, no, I'm sorry." She glanced at the doors, and stiffened up. "Go change!

I looked at Sue, as she said, "Oh, she's not worried about you. She's worried about them."

Sue pointed to the cheerleaders heading in from volleyball. They had been watching the last game.

Neither of us said anything but we understood. Ms K was rumored to be Gay also. Now a Gay teacher grabbing a known Gay student well this was just too much.

I went from happy to pissed-off in two seconds. Heading back to the locker room I walked right past my locker, to the bathroom to smoke.

The more I thought the madder I got. I think that was the first time I'd seen a teacher have a good time in a class, and felt comfortable joking around with the students, with ME. All she did was stop a shot. It's not like she made a pass at me. Why wasn't she allowed to just laugh about it like everyone else? Great, now my mere existence is making the lives of people even just near me hell. If the cheerleaders weren't in the doorway would she have acted the same?

I finished my smoke grinding the butt against the wall leaving a black streak on the painted pink cinderblock.

## Under Aged

After my smoke, I walked back toward my locker. June whispered, "Did you hear it?" Before I could answer she added, "Shhh listen..."

A hushed voice floated over the lockers. "Do you think they were ever together?"

I whispered, "Are they talking about me and Sue?"

No, you and Ms K! Sue did get mentioned. Not sure if they knew Sue was in here changing. Someone, said you and Sue go way back, like to grade school, and that poor Sue probably doesn't even know, besides she has a boyfriend.

I asked, "Did Sue hear them? What did she do?"

I don't know. I wasn't about to go talk to her. If I could hear all the way over here, I'm sure she did too. She just changed and left. Pretended like she didn't hear it, I guess. Are you going to say anything to her?

Looking away, "Yeah, 'nice knowing ya.'"

Senior year continually got worse. By midterms the only person I was talking to was June. I had stopped trusting anyone. Needless to say this put an unhealthy pressure on June. I refused counseling from friends or professionals, and depended solely on June.

About the only friends I trusted were the two "potentially gay" girls we met that summer, Liza and Laurie. They worked at the local Buger Pickle together where we met every day. It had been about 6 months since we first met them, and it was pretty obvious they were hinting at something. We weren't sure if they were together or not, but we figured

at least one was gay. I considered them friends, although we never really socialized outside of being their customers. Sometimes one or both would sit with us for a few minutes when the place was empty. If me, and June lingered long enough one might bring us more coffee and chat for a few minutes. We did find out they were both older than us, out of school and out of college. One was the manager. Although they didn't live together, Liza the younger one, stayed at her manager's house fairly often.

They kept giving us little looks, and made alluding jokes. We could catch them looking at each other whenever we said something potentially revealing. That winter, just before our 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary, we decided to tell them in a Holiday card.

We walked in and caught, Liza when no one was looking and passed her the card. Told her it was for her and Laurie. It read the usual Holiday Greeting stuff then at the bottom we wrote, "...and the answer to the question you haven't asked yet, is YES. "

Liza came running out after reading the card whispering; "I knew it, I knew it, I knew it." She was all happy, and asked if we could stay a little longer today. She couldn't wait and kept popping by pretending to be doing something like wiping down a table, and asking little one and two word questions.

Pointing at the both of us back forth she'd whisper, "together?"

Yes.

Making a circle with her hand she'd ask, "How long?"

2

With her an eyebrow cocked, "in school?"

Yes.

Finally, the resturant cleared out and they both sat down holding the card. They had so many questions the first of which was how long had we been together. We smiled and said it'll be two years the end of January. Laurie said "oh two YEARS! My, that's great! When Liza came back, and said 2, I thought she must have heard wrong. I know you've been coming here together even before I started, and it had to be more than 2 months, but I would have never guessed 2 years. "

Liza leaned in, "So do you go to the same school?"

Yes.

Is that where you met?

Yes.

Laurie piped in, "What school?"

Portfield.

They both tilted their heads. "Where is that?"

"Uhm in Portfield." Once it dawned on them we were not college students but high school students, they freaked out!

So much for acceptance, apparently there is a minimum age requirement to be Gay.

World Cup

As we suspected one was Gay and the other was, well, she never really said. They weren't together, and more importantly they weren't out. Laurie was fairly vague about things, although I got the feeling Liza was pining for her.

I was really hoping to find other Gay people to socialize with but once the age difference came to light it was apparent that hanging in the same social circles would not happen.

Considering we were both living with our parents, barely 17, I can't blame them.

We made it to our 2 year anniversary, but on Valentines Day things came to an end. I can honestly say by our second anniversary I was an over-protective, overly-dependent, fatally pessimistic asshole.

Shortly after Holiday break the talk heated up again, and June couldn't take it. It was ok when it was just a few people, but she had lots of family, sisters and cousins in the same school district, and even in high school with us. Once it became the talk of the school, she had to hide it from her family and started dating guys behind my back. She had one of those families, you know where you can like black musicians but every one gets up tight if you say you love them? I guess I was not going to pass the test, although her father loved me, he just didn't want me loving his daughter. Considering I stopped being a very fun person to be around anymore, I didn't give her any reason to try and work things out. I had stopped drinking but didn't stop being an asshole, and the environment at school only worsened my attitude about everything,

I didn't see it coming, but looking back I can see that in my senior year especially I became increasingly possessive, obsessive, and just out of control. I couldn't control anything else and tried to control June. I got mad at her for stupid things, and spent more time yelling than listening.

On Valentine's Day she told me it was over. We had a nasty terrible break up. I did every stalker dumb ass embarrassing thing possible. I was hurt bad, and out to hurt

everyone in my path, and I accomplished that quite well for a long time. She tried to maintain a friendship with me, maybe only because by then no one else would.

When graduation day came, we had been ok for a few weeks. I gave her some space and left her alone. I knew she was dating some guy so it was best just not to be around her because I would most likely just say something mean.

That morning I was pretty psyched to graduate. There were times I thought I'd never finish high school, June too. Even through the shit of the last few months some how we held it together enough to graduate. We had planned the whole day back in grade school when we first met and were best friends. The phone rang, it was June. Before she could say anything I asked her what time she wanted me to pick her up. She corrected me and reminded me she was with "him." She called to tell me she was going with him. I tried to argue that we'd planned this years ago. Said something nasty about her timing, and honestly I don't know what was said after that. As she tried to explain, I hung up. Staring at the phone waiting for it to ring, for it to be a bad joke I lost it.

I didn't go into a rage, but inside everything was falling apart. Outwardly all you could see was me walking to the family room, turning on the TV, then drop to the couch. The World Cup was on.

I convinced my parents I was more interested in the World Cup Soccer match than graduation. I never went. I did here that my name was called more than once, and a hush came over the Dome Arena when it became obvious I wasn't there. I was at rehearsal the day before. I wished I could have seen my counselors' faces. They were probably thinking "Thank God she offed herself after the school year was over."

I sat on the couch watching the game with red eyes; Argentina 3; West Germany 2.

### **3,000 Miles from Here**

Walking into the Sunlight I squinted my eyes open, as my head passed out from under the restaurant awning. I can just see the sign of the old place where Laurie and Liza worked. I heard Laurie is still managing there.

Where did the time go? I was so far from those days, I was about to walk away from this town with an Associates, and a Bachelors degree. In a few months of I'll be out of here, off to grad school. I still remember picking up my records from Ports field's admin office for graduate school.

I walked in past the attendance office and saw a crowd of kids waiting for the bell, being held back by a hall monitor. I just walked right through the crowd as she yelled at me, asking me for my pass. I turned and flipped her off. In the main office while waiting to get my records, I ran into Mrs. Shaw, the math teacher who cared. I wanted to tell her she was one of the few bright spots in the school, but I just smiled and told here why I was there. She smiled repeating, "I knew it. I knew it." I told them you weren't stupid."

Actually I just made honor roll my senior year.

Again, repeated "I knew it! Good for you. You showed them!"

I gave a hug good bye to butthead, Cindy and the crew thinking, "Yeah, I showed them, sarcastically. Fuck, I let them break me." At least I didn't drop out of school, or out of life and become a statistic, I had survived, and was moving on.

Ok, I didn't get accepted to Berkeley, but my school was still on the West coast. It's still 3,000 miles from here, from my family. With any luck I'll never come back, I'll never look back, I'll never even think of this again.

Little did I know I was about to start it all over again in San Francisco.

The plane began to take off. Nice empty flight. Everyone had a row to themselves. Shaking back and forth, and up and down it seemed like it would never get off the ground. I closed my eyes for a moment as my body pressed into the seat. When I finally squinted my eyes open toward the window I could see the plane was already well above the ground. Out the window was a constant change of shapes and sizes on the ground.

The plane's wing dipped towards the ground superimposing darkness across the plane. Light over took the darkness as the plane leveled off.

I can't believe I had gone back. I said I would never return. Law School was a disaster. First the hate mail, then the outing, then the law suit. Who knew San Francisco could be so intolerant.

Looking about the cabin I wondered if any of them were running away. Did any of them also feel the pain and frustration begin to fade and disappear with the distance? One girl caught my eye. Up in the front was a girl scribbling on a note pad. She kept looking back, probably mesmerized by the green hair. She didn't seem to be able to keep her eyes to herself. Now there was a story.

I pulled out my notebook and began to write.