

A Daughter's Reflections About A Gay Father

By "Debbie Smith"

As the flames engulfed our living room, I scarcely escaped in time to save my life. Sound asleep upstairs, I awoke to the acrid smell of smoke and opened my bedroom door. Rushing downstairs, I managed to open the front door and get out just as the chair where my brother had fallen asleep with a cigarette in his hand burst into flames.

Truthfully, though, my life had gone up in smoke seven years ago. That is when my father decided that he was ready to parent my brother and me on his own, without the aid of my paternal grandmother. My mother had died five years earlier, and we had moved in with grandma and my uncle. Little did I know what lay before me once we moved away, or I would have protested. Promises of more time with Dad, a community swimming pool to play in and time with my cousins allayed the fears that I had about entering this new world.

However, it wasn't long before this dream became a nightmare. Extreme shyness filled my soul as I adapted to suburbia. In addition, my dad didn't change his lifestyle. Actually, it worsened. His drinking made him more irritable and undependable.

In addition, he finally gave in to his desires to seek sexual relationships with males. Having several failed relationships with women after my mother died, Dad decided that perhaps it was time to do what he had always desired – join the gay subculture. In all likelihood, Dad was out with his "gay" friends the night of the fire.

In many ways, I suppose I was fortunate. The gay community in the 1970's was not as bold and flamboyant as it is now. Gay pride parades were not the norm and most gay communities were located in urban areas such as the one that Dad eventually chose to live in after forcing my brother to move out – Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C.

However, his relationships have had a profound impact on our lives. In late adolescence, we visited him in the hospital because he was suffering from hepatitis, and was saddened by the fact that he was so ill. At the time, I didn't know it was caused by his lifestyle, but later when I learned this, I found it difficult to understand why someone would choose to live a lifestyle that was so physically dangerous.

About the same time, one of my dad's "friends" spent the night with him. From what Dad told me, they had a quarrel and the man left, angry with my father for some reason. How did he deal with his anger? He stole our only vehicle. I'll never forget wandering around the parking lot where we lived, wondering where our car was. Then, I heard about the argument when I called Dad at work. Is this any way for a young woman to live? Aren't fathers supposed to protect their families from people like this?

Other aspects of the "lifestyle" affected my life. How is a young woman supposed to deal with homosexual pornography that she finds in her father's closet? Is this something

that one talks about in private conversations? I never talked about it until I got into counseling years later. Or what does one do when dear old Dad asks you to type up some things that he's written, and it turns out to be pornographic in nature? The desire to please and obey parents is overridden by the disgust felt upon reading this trash. How can your own father think like this? It is difficult not to feel polluted by the experience and wonder if, somehow, you are not damaged goods because of the corruption of your father's mind.

What about the lack of positive feedback regarding females and femininity? As I look back, even when my brother and I were young, there was little interaction between my father and I. There were few compliments about the way I dressed or acted in ways that were affirming. Expressions of emotion were rare, unless they were angry rants about his job, his relationships or other challenges in his life.

For all intents and purposes, the gay community has had my father in its grips for over 30 years now. He has, for the most part, written off his family. He rarely spent holidays with our family, choosing at times to go to countries like Turkey with one of his friends where he felt there would be no celebration of Christmas. Even when he spent time with us, he often had his head buried in a book, rarely showing interest in our lives.

He has not seen my children since the early 1990's and has never seen his great-grandchildren. He had no desire to attend my children's weddings or see them graduate from high school or college. When told about his latest great-grandchild, he caustically commented that he better get a face lift. Heaven forbid someone knowing he was old enough to be a great-grandfather.

And who are the people Dad chooses to form relationships with? Drug addicts, alcoholics, thieves. Recently, I called my father after not hearing from him for quite a long time. Why hadn't he called me? Had I committed the unforgivable sin? No, one of his cohorts had stolen \$500 and his address book from him. There's no point in admonishing Dad about his choice of friends. He won't listen.

This "subculture of death" promotes dysfunctional lifestyles, disease, domestic violence, drug abuse, divorce, deviant literature, divisiveness in families and ultimately, destruction - Destruction of the body, mind and soul.

There is probably much more I could share with you, but Dad is very secretive about his life. A few years ago, my sister-in-law called and was alarmed that my dad was talking about committing suicide. She said I needed to come right away. When I called and told him I was traveling several hundred miles to see him, he coldly informed me that he hoped I didn't plan on spending the time at his home, as I would probably see things that would disturb me. Is this the way you treat someone who is concerned for your life?

Occasionally he talks about his friends, or alludes to not feeling well because of some disease that he won't name but that is probably a result of his lifestyle. What is really sad is that a man who used to be so outgoing has now become a recluse. He rarely goes out, and now that he is at an age where he is not as physically attractive as he used to be, he is

shunned by the gay community. A community that he once told me was difficult to enter when he first moved to Dupont Circle in the mid-70's has, for the most part, written him off.

He has rejected my offer to take care of him in his old age, informing me that he would rather go to a nursing home than live with me. Perhaps this is just as well. There have been times, I have to admit, when fear of taking care of someone dying of AIDS has consumed me. What would people think, especially some "good church people" who feel people with this illness need to suffer the consequences of their actions? Dad has assured me that he "takes precautions" but when involved in the gay life, isn't there always the possibility that one can be exposed to this deadly disease?

I have also felt the need to be secretive about my father. Few people would understand, I think, about the implications of this situation on one's life. My dad may have "come out of the closet" but I haven't, especially if I fear that someone would judge me on account of his behavior. Might they be concerned that I was a closet homosexual? An irrational fear, on my part, I imagine, but still there. Not even my children know this fact about their grandfather. I guess what I really feel is shame. It is as if, somehow, I caused this choice on his part. Irrational? Yes, but still there.

Meeting your parent's friends can be at times rewarding, at times challenging. I have never enjoyed meeting Dad's friends. Most of them reject me because of the choices I have made with my life. Perhaps they sense that I have a difficult time relating to them because I can't understand the choices they have made. Regardless, it is never a happy occasion, unfortunately.

The spiritual implications of his choices negatively affected me for years. Soon after his decision to align himself with the gay culture, my dad stopped attending church, as did my brother. Although the Catholic church services did not do much for me, I held on to them as a reminder of the life I had before the chaos of "gay life" became the norm in our household. However, as I aged, I also joined my family in giving up on church. What kind of God would sanction and allow this kind of life? Why wasn't He doing more to rescue me? Didn't He care?

Like many people, my concept of God was affected by my relationship with my father. If my father felt that no one would ever want me, as he once told me, I assumed God would feel the same way. If Dad delighted in hurting the women who had been in his life by rejoicing at the shock on their faces when he told them he was gay, I imagined that God was also sadistic in nature. If I could sit on the steps in the townhouse where we lived and cry because no one seemed to care about me, surely God didn't care about me, either.

However, as I look back, God brought many good people into my life, including my husband, to help me avoid following the path that Dad had taken. By all rights, I should be an alcoholic lesbian who has no interest in God. Instead, I am a born-again Christian

who rejoices in the many blessings that God has given me and look forward to spending time with Him for eternity.

And now I understand why He allowed my childhood to happen as it did. I want to warn everyone that I can about the dangers of the gay lifestyle. Thirty years ago, when all this began, I couldn't understand its significance, but now that the homosexual agenda is becoming more and more prominent in cultures around the world, the alarm bells need to be sounded. As one who has seen the harm that comes, I feel that God has given me insights that need to be shared.

Perhaps I was created "for such a time as this."