

Growing up in a small suburban village in Ohio, I was always aware that a collision was coming. It wasn't a matter of avoiding it, it was a matter of trying to discern what it might entail and how to minimize collateral damage.

From early elementary age, I knew I was different. I wasn't sure how. I knew that available models of how to live my life did not represent "me." There were "cute" attempts at reinforcing the majority model. "Welcome Wagon," for example, where the little boys lined up on one side of the room and little girls on the other, then you would walk across and choose a dance partner. Nothing could have been more horrifying to me. Not merely a level of social discomfort, it was an abject and visceral rebellion that this did not honor the true essence of myself and I would not be dishonest and pretend that it did. I couldn't have verbalized this or explained the maelstrom of my feelings at the time. In the meantime, the only shield I could manufacture was to be the Best Little Boy in the World. My grades and my accomplishments obviously proved that I was! I was hoping this would help make up for the coming disaster, a sort of "acceptance bank account" I'd have to cash in later.

Starting at about age 12, I could sense the immediacy of the collision, so I prayed to God every day that I would give up whatever was asked if only I could just be like everyone else. What that was, I had no clue. I didn't know straight from gay. I did know that when LGBT demonstrations were shown on TV, my Dad would throw his slipper at the TV and scream "WHAT DO THOSE G_DD_MN FAGS WANT???" Mostly drag queens on the screen, I didn't feel that was me. Still, I could sense there wasn't much leeway in what my parents could accept from me. I was afraid that I couldn't live up to what they expected, and that this wasn't just grades and honors, it was a lack of my value as a human being. How do you make up for that? There were no other visible examples of alternate possibilities. My parents barely had a high school education, they were wonderful but not worldly. They couldn't help me with this any more than they could with my calculus homework.

In high school, I started to understand parts of it. God hadn't answered my prayers and made me like everyone else. This was a big disappointment to me. But rather than give up on God, I came to feel that God and I had a basic understanding from which I could proceed. I was accepted by God just as I was, that was the good news. Honestly, it didn't count for much at the time. The bad news was: I'd have to forge my own happiness out of what I possessed inside myself and the resources around me. There would be no miraculous change and not much outside help. OK, then, now that we know the parameters, it's off to the races.

I've had a happy, blessed life! But for those who say sexuality is a choice, I can't imagine putting any more effort into "praying the gay away" than I did. What's left when God says no to something?

So, why do we need Pride? I see Pride as one way to provide an on-screen alias, a clickable shortcut for people who don't see a path forward. The heteronormal path is still quite effectively laid out by our culture, it's not hard to see or follow. It's the alternative paths that need the signposts that events like Pride can provide. I worked hard on my life, and until I was about 30 I was doing it alone. I mean, not totally alone, but even feeling God was my ally didn't mean that S/He was appearing daily to instruct me on the finer points. There was a lot of panic and loneliness. If one child of God can be spared the fear of exposure, the agony of discovery, the lack of positive role models, and the self-incrimination and despair, I am all for it.