

“Façade”

By Logan Nutt

Picture this: I’m the typical student who never skips school. I always turn in my assignments, do my best on tests, and always get an A. I work a part time job and even play a sport! I run track and attempt to play baseball, which was is huge fail (I couldn't hit the damn ball to save my life). Everyday I try to keep myself busy. No... not busy, distracted? Yes, that’s it, I try to keep myself distracted. Distracted from a vile thought, a secret. A secret that could destroy my life.

Now, here I sat in middle school. As I sat here all I can think about is that I am very different from most of the boys here. I didn’t enjoy playing sports or “hanging with the boys.” I was always more comfortable around girls; in fact, I had way more female friends than I did male friends. I could relate more with the girls, whereas the only thing I had in common with my guy friends was the fact that we all played video games. It is quite funny, this whole situation, as my family would always call me a *ladies’ man*.

All of my guy friends were joining a sports team, so to follow the masses and attempt to fit in, so did I. I tried out for football and immediately changed my mind after getting tackled. I didn’t enjoy basketball whatsoever. I tried out for baseball, and, as mentioned above, I couldn’t hit the ball. Then I tried out for track. I came to enjoy running, especially long distance, so that’s what I did.

Running track is where I experienced my first crush ever. As embarrassing as it is to admit, it’s nonetheless the truth. However, this is where a lot of internal conflict comes in. You see, I didn’t have a crush on a girl like most boys did. You see, my little crush was on a boy who

I ran with. As someone who comes from a semi-religious family, you can see where a lot of problems might arise.

I would try to convince myself that this can't be true. Why would I have a crush on a boy? "Eww that's so gross," I would think to myself. I would bully myself into falsely believing that I was straight. I battled with my thoughts and my inner feelings day and night. I would suppress my emotions because that's what men do. Society believes that a boy can't feel sadness, a boy can't cry, a boy has to be strong because if a boy isn't strong then what is he? Weak.

A few years later I was in high school. My high school was a very, very toxic atmosphere. Students weren't allowed to be different. You were judged for anything and everything we did, from the shirt you wore to the brand of your backpack. If you weren't like the copy and paste boys—you know, the ones who wear basketball shorts and tight t-shirts— or a popular girl, then you were susceptible to severe judgment. Just to put it in perspective, a student who was in ninth grade was bullied so severely that it resulted in him taking his life. He was still a kid who had his whole life ahead of him. Another student who was bullied posted on his social media that he was going to shoot up the school. The next morning, the Pennsylvania State Police checked everyone's bag. Here I thought high school was supposed to be the time of my life, not something that could take life away.

Those who were gay were targeted heavily. They were called horrible names like "queer" and "faggot." Those who weren't "skinny" were called fat, ugly, and unlovable. Those who were too skinny were called disgusting and were told they needed to eat. No matter what students did, there was no escape. Thankfully, I didn't experience any of this. Well, at least, at first I didn't as I was still in the closet at this time. I was still putting on this facade to avoid being targeted.

My senior year was the most exciting and saddest time in my high school career. You see, by this time, I was madly depressed and had already attempted taking my life twice. All I really wanted was someone to care, for someone to see what I was going through. I waited forever and nobody even looked up. Perhaps I'm alive today because I never really wanted to die? I guess I'll never know.

Depression sucks. It's the one thing that I hope even the person I hate the most will never experience. It feels like you're walking through a minefield and every step you take could be your last. If I just told someone my secret, anyone at all, then perhaps I'd start to feel better? If they could accept me, then maybe I could accept myself or at least learn to accept myself?

Inevitably, that's what I did. I came out to one of my best friends, Kayla. She was gay herself and had a girlfriend. I still remember the conversation. We were sitting in her car eating McDonald's during our lunch break. I looked over to her.

"I have something important to tell you. I've been keeping it to myself and I can't stand it any longer," I said.

"So say it with your chest," she replied.

"No seriously, I'm not joking Kayla," I sat bouncing my knee out of nervousness.

"Neither am I, so say what you gotta say, gay-boy." Now that I look back, that reply was quite funny considering she didn't know I was about to come out.

"I'm gay," I answered with tears in my eyes.

We had a long conversation afterwards that I won't bore you with. Kayla gave me the confidence I needed, that I craved. One by one, I came out to my family, and to my surprise, they all accepted me. They all loved me. But most importantly, I feared what my aunt was going to say. She and I are extremely close. She's like my second mom; I go to her about everything. We

would go to flea markets every Sunday, and afterwards, we'd go to lunch. I didn't want to lose that. I feared this because she's the most religious in our family. Nonetheless, my mother told me to tell her. So one Sunday afternoon, after we were finished with all of our activities I looked her in her eyes and I blatantly told her I was gay. I'll never forget what she said:

“Bug (my family nickname), I always knew. I love you for the intelligent, empathetic man that you're becoming. There's nothing that you could ever do to change my mind. I know you were scared about telling me and I know you don't believe in the God that I do. I also know that's exactly why you were scared to tell me. My God is a loving god, he loves all of his children.” Her words meant the world to me. Her acceptance was like a weight lifting off of my shoulders.

I lost a few friends when I came out. Some family members didn't accept me and tried forcing religious zeal down my throat. I have to look past them. I have to be above those that are so low that they wish to see you on the same level as them. To be honest I didn't think I'd come this far. Yet here I am at the age of 18. I'm a medical assistant, phlebotomist, and painter. I've acquired many certifications and awards. Maybe I didn't actually want to die, perhaps I just wanted that dark part of me to. I'm happy that I made that jump, that leap of faith.

What is the meaning of all of this you might ask? The point is that I learned to light that spark inside of my chest and be fearless. I learned to not hide in the shadows of others and neither should you. I learned that it's okay to function outside of societal normalities. I chose to become who I am meant to be. Be who you are meant to be and accept those who aren't the same as you. After all, we can't love each other in the dark.