



THE FORKS IN THE ROAD: COMING OUT, MOVING ON

By Megan Hutton

There are always forks in the road, turns and twists that determine our destiny. Sometimes we ignore that gut feeling which could be, “truth.” If we are self-aware we recognize the path. If we don’t take it, the journey to where we want to be could be a long one.

I had a preconceived idea of where I wanted to go when I emerged from the sixties, but for reasons unknown I ignored it. Living on my own from fourteen to twenty I gained an awareness I would never have known if my life had been a traditional one. While the Vietnam War shook my foundations, the nightly gatherings on the beach with musicians soothed my soul.

The next stage was to be a stark contrast to my carefree days as a poet, and the young woman

who knew what she ultimately wanted in life - to be with another woman – yet I didn’t know how I was going to get there. From the coffee houses where I read my poetry, I went to The Playhouse Theatre company, who were auditioning actors for their first apprentice program, and I was one of the lucky few who was chosen.

I realized the inherent differences in my life, and the lives of my peers during this time. These people had regular families and people who took care of them. I was still floating through life on my own. There were no visible lesbians and no role models. It was still a very hush-hush world when it came to what was only referred to as homosexuality. The word gay was used sparingly, but lesbian almost never. It was a confusing time. I had absolutely no interest in men, and had never dated, but I also knew that I wanted to have children, and marriage at the time seemed to be the only reasonable solution. I got married. Looking back, I realize

just how far down I had stuffed the reality of who I was, and what I wanted.

Prior to my marriage, my friends were beginning to tease me about not dating, and joked about me being a lesbian. If they only knew. Getting to the alter should have been my first clue. I got lost on the big day, and was an hour and a half late. Eventually I had two children, then my mind was trying to process how I would ever be able to live as a lesbian with children. I became a closeted suburban lesbian. Women in larger cities were fighting for equality and coming out of the closet, and here I was tip toeing through the living room with The Friendly Giant, and watching Sesame Street with my two young children.

The sixties had opened people up to new possibilities, and had them thinking about relationships. The Hite Report came out and explored Lesbianism as something many women secretly wanted to experience. It appeared that there were many curious married women hiding in the suburbs. We were inundated with books on relationships, and open marriage was being explored as an option to boredom.

If you were depressed or lonely there was, "The Book of Hope." Jonathan Livingstone Seagull encouraged us to seek peace. Books like "I'm OK You're OK," made us cautious about things we took for granted. We were advised to, "Hang loose." If we were angry we could punch pillows under the watchful eye of a therapist for a small fee, as Gestalt was an existential and experimental form of therapy.

Married lesbians were fearful of losing their children if they came out or decided to leave. The courts were not in favour of lesbians raising children. My confidence around my attraction to women had waned, and I filed it under, "A Fantasy." I wish I had been braver, but I wasn't. Like many women who had married for the wrong reasons, I felt stuck, bored, and very lonely. My own discomfort around a lifestyle I knew that I wanted was quite puzzling.





This became obvious the first time a woman expressed interest in me.

A friend in my suburb invited me over for a visit one evening. She confided with me that her husband, who was gay, lived downstairs and they both parented their children. This was my first realization there were other lesbians in the suburbs. During our visit she leaned over and said, "I can't wait to kiss you". My reaction was startling. I froze and was speechless. I got out of there as quick as possible, as my feelings were so conflicted. The moment I had dreamed about had come and terrified me at the same time.

That incident planted a seed, and I now knew that I was biding my time, and would be ready the next time. It still wasn't easy. What would this mean for the safe bubble I had created for myself? The courage I had gained living on my own as a teenager had almost vanished, and I had become complacent. I lost my identity when I was married. I was Mrs. something and my name didn't matter. I couldn't even get a medical procedure on my own body without his permission. We moved to Toronto shortly after that and my life changed, again.

I joined 21 McGill, a women's club that was in the heart of the city, and a mecca for closeted lesbians. Eventually we found one another. One evening after dinner at the club, I was walking with a friend and heard loud laughter coming from a house. We decided to check it

out, and walked into a room full of surprised lesbians holding a meeting about a baseball team. My life was changing from mundane to exciting, but I was still married.

The following summer I was in Halifax for three months for a production at the Neptune Theatre. I had an immediate connection to the lead actress, and it didn't go unnoticed by other members of the cast. The actress was about twenty years older than I was, and I was very attracted to her. One day a younger actress came up to caution me, "Stay away from her, she's a lesbian". I wish I'd had the courage to say that I was too, but I didn't. I left my marriage and we shared responsibility for the children until my ex-husband passed away suddenly when the children were nine and eleven.

In the early days everyone was looking for their "type." There were many stereotypical views on what constituted a good match. With maturity comes the realization that commonality, compassion, and kindness are probably more lasting than looking for a "type." I wanted to see if things are different today, so I interviewed four students in their twenties, and found a common thread.

Paige O'Sullivan is a 26-year-old lesbian. Confident and sure of who she is, Paige is working on her Master's in Education. I asked about her coming out experience with her family. "I was 16 and had just returned from a week at a Catholic Christian camp. My mom

had a friend over and we got into a discussion about homosexuality and the Bible. Of course I was refuting their claims. My mom's friend looked at me and said, "Are you trying to tell us you're a lesbian." I said, I guessed I was. My mom was silent, then she said I wasn't old enough to know that. For about a month I said I was bisexual, because I thought that might be easier for them, but it didn't last long. My mom and I didn't talk for about a year. She's very traditional, it's still not something we talk about a lot. When I told my dad a few years later his response was much better."

A few years earlier I'd met Paige's now partner, Kate. I received a call from York (Glendon) residence one winter night asking if I could drive up. My granddaughter said one of her friend's was very upset because she was going to come out to her mom. I arrived to a sobbing 20-year-old Kate who fell into my arms. I held her on the couch for a couple of hours, consoling her. I was incredulous that in this age of education and information there is still so much angst over coming out.

I also interviewed Juan Garrido, a former York (Glendon) student, and his good friend Madison Morrison, both in their twenties. Juan's experience was quite different. "I started to question my sexuality when I was about fourteen, and decided to come out to my mom. She is from a different culture and never exposed to gay people. I told her I thought I was gay. A couple of days later she told me she'd told my older brother and sister. They had a conversation with me about being too young to make a decision. Then my mom told other members of my family, an aunt and uncle. They told me flat out, being gay was wrong."

"These conversations forced me back into the closet. In grade twelve I came out to my sister as bisexual. A few weeks later she told my mom and my brother. We went through it again. When my dad came home we told him. Although he said he didn't understand it either, he was the most understanding of all. He said he didn't understand it, and he was concerned about my future happiness. Now it's a don't tell mentality. We don't really talk about it. That's a bit difficult

for them because I'm an active advocate for LGBTQ and the Multiple Sclerosis communities. Last year I gave a Ted Talk at York University on, "The Value of Vulnerabilities."

"One of my best friends is Madison Morrison who grew up with a grandmother who was a lesbian. She came to Glendon as a speaker on many occasions to talk to students about coming out. Madison has a different attitude about sexuality, which she describes as a non-issue. We joke and say to one another, if we haven't found anyone to share our lives with by the time we're thirty, then we'll live together. We were both diagnosed with MS in our early twenties. It makes us realize how precious the moments are in our lives are".

The twenties are a time of exploration and figuring out who we are. That doesn't appear to have changed much over the generations. My own personal struggle had been to find myself, not the self that others needed or thought I should be. I was born a "free spirit." I cherish openness and vulnerability along with self-awareness, the same qualities I admire in others. Along with that goes honesty and a kind heart. All true attributes to the most lasting and satisfying relationships, lesbian, gay, or otherwise.

As Maddison perfectly surmised, "I will fall in love with a person, male, female or other, I'm not tied down to stereotypes, just another human." I wish everyone had that attitude.

In the early 1960's Megan spent five of her teenage years on her own. Through the solitude of those years she found life to be a great teacher. Today she is a Poet/Playwright/Short Story writer, and has published numerous articles on relationships. She read from the Anthology "Dykewords" at Toronto's first "Word on the Street", and she's currently working on a poetry collection and a short film.

