

The Closet

As we drove along we talked about all sorts of interesting things. That's what I love about his company, he is well read and knows so much about so many things.

We'd just finished talking about some memorable period in history when he told me he'd been going through a difficult time.

His life was not how he wanted it to be.

I was surprised to hear him speak this way. Although he was a bit of a recluse, I had never known him to feel like this.

"Being gay is a difficult life," he said.

"Some people find me repugnant because of who I am, but who else can I be?"

I thought about the day he revealed his secret to me, many years prior. He was 18 years old and wonderfully interesting. He was artistic, funny, clever, and was a very talented actor.

After leaving home at the age of 17 he turned alternative - he had long wavy hair, wore black nail polish and worked at the foundry helping unemployed youth.

In those days we didn't see much of each other because neither of us lived at home and we had different friends and interests.

Unexpectedly one night I got a call from him. He sounded upset. He told me he was going through a painful break-up and needed to talk to me. 'Who is she,' I demanded. 'I'll show her what for.'

'It isn't a girl who broke my heart,' he said. It's a boy.'

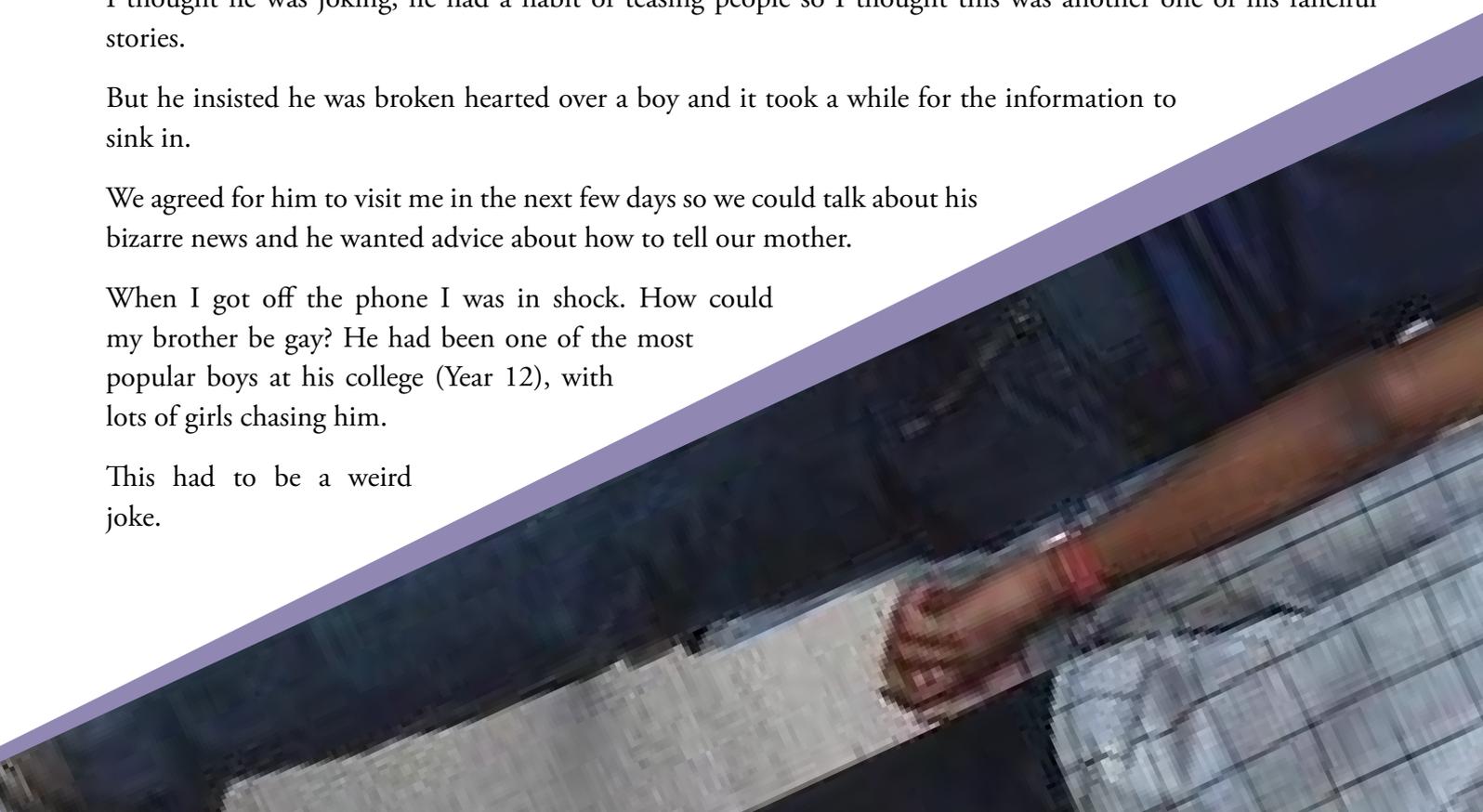
I thought he was joking, he had a habit of teasing people so I thought this was another one of his fanciful stories.

But he insisted he was broken hearted over a boy and it took a while for the information to sink in.

We agreed for him to visit me in the next few days so we could talk about his bizarre news and he wanted advice about how to tell our mother.

When I got off the phone I was in shock. How could my brother be gay? He had been one of the most popular boys at his college (Year 12), with lots of girls chasing him.

This had to be a weird joke.



He arrived a few days later hoping I would be the shoulder to cry on – the sister who would accept him unconditionally and help him to tell the rest of the family. But instead I questioned him like he was a criminal. I wanted him to stop this nonsense and be normal like he was before.

I couldn't accept he was gay – I had never seen signs of it so how could he be this way.

I wanted to know whether he had been molested at the all boys school he attended until Year 10. I wanted to know who he had his first sexual experience with – was it a boy or a girl? Maybe he was an environmentally made gay – maybe that all boys school had a lot to answer for – maybe because they weren't exposed to girls he developed unnatural feelings toward boys.

But he insisted he had been attracted to boys since he could remember, before he even reached puberty.

He wanted me to accept him. He also wanted me to help him tell our mother, who was very catholic. He worried he would be rejected by her and my older sister who also had strong religious convictions.

I promised I would support him, even though I couldn't get my head around the whole bizarre tale.

Over time I did come to terms with his sexuality but I continued to search for answers about why he was gay. The questioning to discover the origins of his homosexuality continued for a long time.

It was not until that day we were driving along did I realize how much pain I had caused him over the years.

'I'm sorry you've been going through a difficult time, questioning why you are gay and struggling with how difficult it has been for you,' I said.

'At least you've got family who accepts and loves you.'

'But you didn't accept me. You kept questioning me for years about why I was gay. I felt I had to justify who I was to you, as if there was something wrong with me,' he said.

'And even though Mum and I got on in a superficial way I knew deep down she didn't accept my homosexuality. I knew she wished I was different and that being gay went against her religious views.

'I really wanted her to accept me for who I am. I wanted her to love me like she loved you girls. When she died she loved you deeply and I wanted her to love me the same way but she didn't.'

His words are etched in my memory. I never thought my desire to understand why he was gay would play a part in him questioning the meaning of his life.

All of a sudden, in that moment, I realized he was born gay and that my search for answers was because I hadn't accepted him unconditionally.

That day changed my life. I knew what I needed to do.

I would never again remain silent when gay and lesbian people were being ridiculed. I would never again allow hateful comments to be said about homosexuals without me defending them. I would
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again make another person feel bad about who they are, and I vowed to fight to change the attitudes of people who did not understand that gay and lesbian people have no more control over their sexuality than red heads have over the colour of their hair.

My greatest regret is that it was too late for me to get my mother to understand how important it was for my brother to have her accept him totally and unreservedly.

I knew she found it hard to accept he was gay because of her religious views but she was a reasonable person and maybe if I had spoken to her about it, things would have been different.

I wanted to tell her that God would not reject her son because he was gay – her son was as nature made him and God understood this. It would be intolerance, persecution and hatred by others that God would scorn.

It has been some years since that day my brother and I went for a drive and had that discussion.

He no longer questions who he is and is very happy with his life.

I'm glad he is happy – he is an interesting man and a very nice human being and after all isn't that what really matters!

