



the Gender and Sexuality Center
and the Lens present

when

i
knew



spring 2012

a collection of stories from
Carleton students describing
when or how they discovered
their sexuality



“we started this project with a pretty simple idea”

When did you know? A few months ago, the Gender & Sexuality Center invited Carleton students to share their stories describing when or how they discovered their sexuality. *When I Knew* is the collection of those realizations. Some are contemplative, some are funny, some are heart-wrenching but all part of the Carleton community.

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Special Thanks to



Gender and Sexuality Center

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I remember first coming across the original “When I Knew” publication four years ago. A meek, confused freshman, I spent an entire afternoon poring through every story on 2nd libe, the book hidden behind my textbook for fear of anyone watching. I found comfort in its pages, relieved that I wasn’t the only one in the world with questions about their sexuality. Each story resonated with me, and I immediately felt connected to something bigger in a way I had never felt before.

Now, four years later, it is an honor to bring this publication that was such a catalyst in my own story back to Carleton. One’s own narrative is a personal and precious treasure, and nothing has been more rewarding than digging into our community and bringing these individual moments into the light. This publication is chock full of diverse perspectives on a universal journey. First of all thank you to Kaaren Williamsen for supporting us through this process. Thank you so much to the contributors who felt empowered enough to add their story to the colorful mosaic that makes up our community. Thank you so much to the designers who gave a visual voice to each of these narratives. And thank you readers for being an audience to our musings and engaging with our moments. My hope is that in reading them you’ll consider own story, regardless of the context, and feel compelled to share it. For every experience had, there is a meek, confused, freshman boy on 2nd libe ready to learn and be inspired.



Alex Brewer

When did I know? Moments...some poignant, some painful, some filled with promise. We live our lives in moments that are spun into stories. These stories are told to our friends, our parents, our children. They are told at bedtime, at lunchtime, at happy hour, and at any time in between. They are told in jokes, over coffee, by email, or maybe only in our dreams.

When did I know that I wanted to help people tell their stories? During New Student Week, I was nervous to come into the Gender and Sexuality Center. I wanted to find friends and a community. I wanted to talk about how I was feeling with people who understood me. I wanted to share my own story in a place where it would be celebrated. I found that community, and three years later, I am a proud member of the GSC staff. Every day, I get to hear stories from people I know and folks I’ve never met.

None of the stories in this publication are finished; everyone continues to experience moments and write more to their stories. You have the extraordinary opportunity to see a snapshot of many stories written by members of our Carleton community. I hope these inspire you to think about your own story, as I was inspired during my own New Student Week.

The moments will come, it’s up to you to write the story.



Michael McClellan

I maybe should have known

when I was five and my parents took my sister and me to Disney World. I was unimpressed with all of the princesses we met, but when John Smith actually picked me up I smiled so wide my family still laughs about it. Who would want to be Cinderella or Snow White when you could be like John Smith and have your very own Pocahontas?

I probably should have known

when Willow and Tara from Buffy the Vampire Slayer kissed and I had so many feelings that I felt sick; or when I was too embarrassed to even google The L Word.

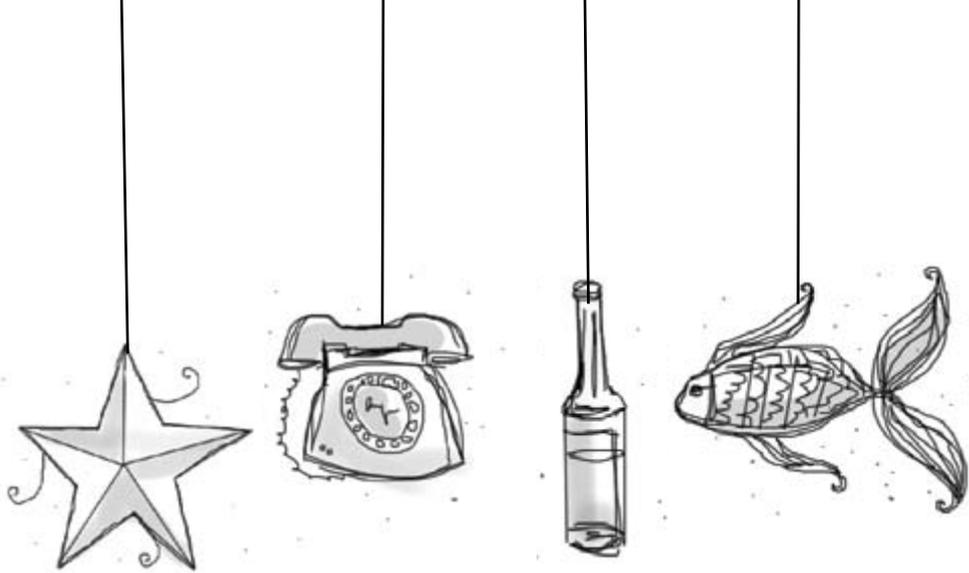
I really should have known

when the perfect boy asked me to the movies. He was funny, had a nice smile and didn't care how blatantly I cheated at soccer. Still, when he asked, my first instinct was to vomit on his cleats.

I finally knew on my high school orchestra's tour

during junior year. We were at a rest stop somewhere in the middle of Iowa and most of the group was back on the bus, but one cellist and I were wasting time in the entryway. We had been in orchestra together since we were eight years old and had been friends for ages, but it wasn't until the way she laughed in that exact moment that I knew. I knew, beyond a fraction of a doubt that I was so, so gay and I just had to put my tongue in that girl's mouth. If you're in a public restroom in Iowa and feel the need for anything beyond intense amounts of Purrell, it is serious business.

JENN BORCHARDT



She was in 8th grade; I was in 7th . I called her house after we lost the championship soccer game. The relief I felt when I reached an answering machine was enormous. I don't know what I would have said to her if she'd picked up. I just couldn't stand to see her cry, and I wanted to fix it.

Later, 10th grade. I fell in love with him at the drive-in theatre. Cars in rows, midnight smelled of smoke and beer and exhaust. We learned each other's bodies while watching Transformers in the back of his mom's Pathfinder under a blanket patterned with fish.

MARLENA HARTMAN—FILSON

I remember a playground debate in early elementary school. Children were divided into camps by sex, shouting at each other.

***Girls are better than boys!
Boys are better than girls!***

Wholeheartedly committed to this argument.

I had tried siding with the few girls my teacher had called aside in an attempt to stop me from spending recess sitting alone and staring morosely at the ground. Almost immediately I had tired of their clapping games and inane chatter. I did not want to play with them. More than anything, I wanted to get in a fight but was too shy to pick one. Nobody ever tried to beat me up; they could probably tell I was already doing it to myself. I realized that this battle of the sexes was my chance to win passage, to break ranks and shock both sides with a breathless

***Boys are better than girls!
Can I play with you now please?***

I didn't take my chance. I stayed silent. It would be seven or eight years before I found a friend group not unified solely by sex.

In the meantime, I remember tugging nervously on my shirt to hide the shape of my chest. I remember wandering through my house, directionless and dazed, after first seeing blood in my underwear. The panic of a trapped animal must have shown in my eyes because my parents asked me what was wrong.

Nothing.

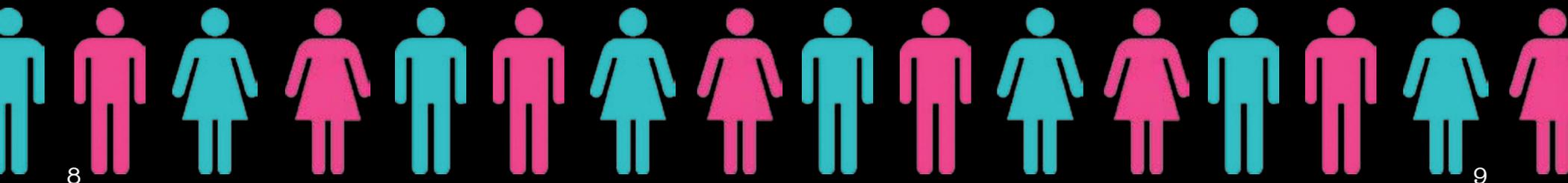
All the boys I had towered over were now looming over me. I remember a health teacher explaining that a man's hips are built for running, mine are for carrying babies; a gym teacher telling us that we would never build muscle like men; sitting behind a football player in history class and hating him for his shoulders.

Part of me knows—has always known—that I am transsexual. I am plagued with doubts worse than my feelings of shame or rage. Would it make me feel better to have my breasts cut off, or would it make me look like a freak? Is this all an attempt to validate my hatred of my impractical hips? Should I trade a little more muscle for body hair I don't want, near-certain baldness, and a chance of destroying my voice?

Is it too late?

I don't know. I still don't know.

E. Sturman



partner partner partner

What did they mean by “partner?” Did they work together?

Later, after they had gone I asked my mom what the two women meant. That day I learned a new word: lesbian. Mom explained to me that even though most of the time women marry men, some women fall in love with other women in just the same way. The more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea. It would be so much simpler to marry a girl, I was sure. It just seemed more natural.

I hope I’m a lesbian.

Mom had said it wasn’t very common.

Too bad I’m probably not.

-Anonymous



I

thought

i

was

straight

,

and

then

I

met

Anna

Swanson

3rd grade

I didn't think anything of it when in 3rd grade I wanted to spend all my time with the teacher's aide from Mount Holyoke. But I knew it was weird that I felt like someone had socked me in the gut when my teacher told the class that Ms. Webb was visiting a man she loved during her spring break.

5th grade

I didn't think it was strange when I got nervous around the girls in my mom's classes when I was in 5th grade. But I thought it was a little strange that I blushed and felt ashamed when Kerri put her arm around my waist.

7th grade

I didn't know if I was infatuated or just fascinated in 7th grade when I saw an all-too-stereotypically-alternative 8th grade girl playing her guitar and singing at our school's talent show.

BUT



About six months later as I stood in the shower, it suddenly hit me that I was never going to have the life I had always thought I would. There would be no husband, no blushing bride in a white dress, no picket fence, or saccharine “fairy-tale wedding” – at least that’s how it seemed at the time.

Standing there in the shower, with equal parts indescribable relief and total panic, I realized that instead, there would be love, joy, and lust of a different, but just as beautiful, kind.

And, finally, all that shit from elementary school made sense.

Anonymous

When I always took the "scenic route" in the locker room, I had an inkling.

When I caught myself staring at the snatch of my classmate's underwear, peeking above his sagging jeans, I had a suspicion.

When I couldn't satisfy the girl I loved, I had a hunch.

When I first saw him move with a grace and confidence that comes from loving your own skin, I had a feeling.

When I felt his arms around me for the first time, that's when I knew.

NED HECKMAN

My first boy crush was T.R. Knight. He played the unassuming Dr. George O'Malley on *Grey's Anatomy*. I thought that he was really sweet and cute. I used to imagine what it would be like to kiss him. In eighth grade, I was at a pool party, and we were playing truth or dare. I admitted on a truth that he was the one and only man that I would ever want to kiss.

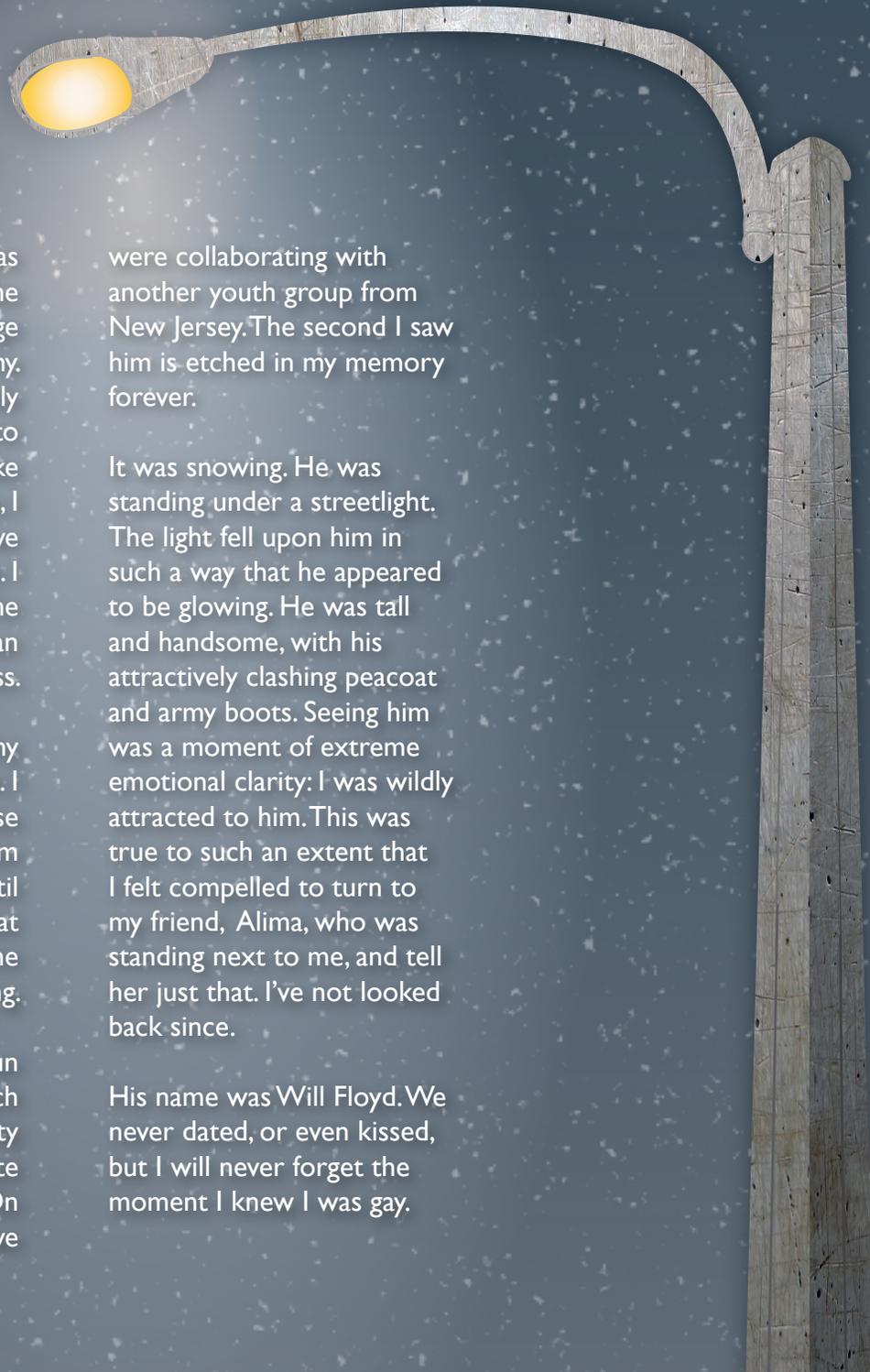
I didn't think much of my attraction to T.R. Knight. I thought that everyone else had someone about whom they felt similar. It wasn't until I was 16 that I realized that this was more than a one time thing.

I was on a Midnight Run with my church, on which we went into New York City at midnight to distribute food to homeless folks. On this particular occasion, we

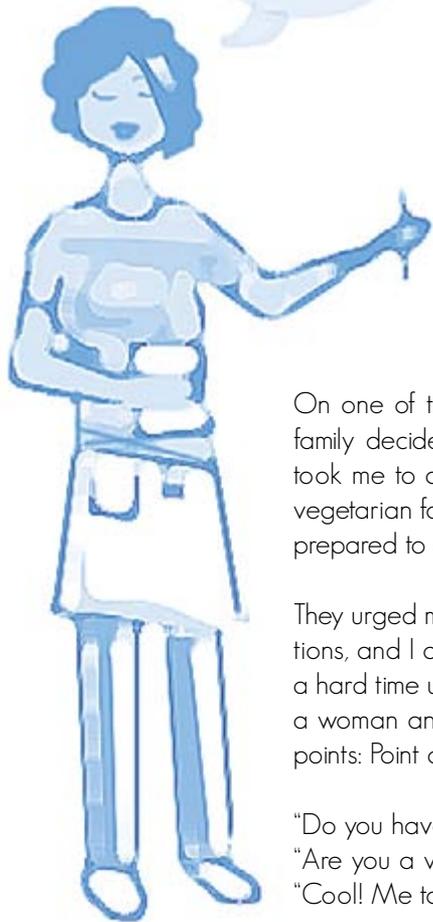
were collaborating with another youth group from New Jersey. The second I saw him is etched in my memory forever.

It was snowing. He was standing under a streetlight. The light fell upon him in such a way that he appeared to be glowing. He was tall and handsome, with his attractively clashing peacoat and army boots. Seeing him was a moment of extreme emotional clarity: I was wildly attracted to him. This was true to such an extent that I felt compelled to turn to my friend, Alima, who was standing next to me, and tell her just that. I've not looked back since.

His name was Will Floyd. We never dated, or even kissed, but I will never forget the moment I knew I was gay.



~~MEAT~~



LASONDRA KERN

On one of the last nights of being home for spring break my family decided to go out to dinner. Unfortunately for me, they took me to a barbecue restaurant knowing that I had been a vegetarian for the last four years. Fuming at their audacity, I was prepared to act like a petulant child.

They urged me to ask the waiter if they had any vegetarian options, and I agreed reluctantly. I was prepared to give the guy a hard time until our server came over. It wasn't a guy at all, but a woman and a very attractive one. In my head I was tallying points: Point one.

"Do you have any vegetarian options?" I asked.

"Are you a vegetarian?" she asked. I nodded and she replied, "Cool! Me too!" Point Two.

She then proceeded to serve me a veggie burger from her "personal stash". Point Three. She even found the only packet of mayo in the whole restaurant for me. Point Four.

Before I knew it I was openly flirting with her in front of my family—something I would not have ever dared to do in the past. She was an attractive vegetarian who rocked the hell out of what is known as the "lesbian haircut". I thought it was only appropriate to give her a generous tip and personally deliver it.

I had just tipped a waitress because she was cute—that's when I knew.

In high school trig class, I was fortunate to sit next to one of my best friends. One Monday morning, she asked how I spent my weekend. I recounted how I had watched the entire Cycle 4 of America's Next Top Model. I would never forget the photo shoot they did in which the models had to represent the seven deadly sins; the photos looked stunning.

She looked at me and asked, "Why did you watch that?" Her voice hushed as she inquired, "Are you gay?"

I responded, without missing a beat, "No, if I was gay, I would have wanted to watch America's Next Top Male Model."

She decided that I was her not-actually-gay gay best friend. I nodded, knowing that half of that was false.



When did I know? Maybe the better question is: When should have I have known?

The Spice Girls concert I begged my father to take me to in 3rd grade? Begging to be Baby Spice for the following Halloween? My Justin Timberlake photo collection?

Despite any signs pointing towards the inevitably fabulous conclusion, I carried on in ignorance (willful or otherwise) until the day that I met Drew. Drew played baseball. Drew had the gym locker next to mine in seventh grade. Drew had THE cutest butt I had ever seen. Everything pointed towards a massive crush. So logically, I started to look for a girlfriend. However, being the uncomfortable, closeted middle schooler I was, my plan had a flaw. The massive error lay in where I decided to search for this girl to cure my gay: theater club. I realize that 13 year old me was a massive idiot.

Despite my shortcoming in the planning department, time passed. I found a girlfriend and forgot about Drew and his cute baseball-playing butt. By this point, I had reached the always popular “maybe I’m just bisexual” phase. I mean I had a girlfriend who I went on (rare) dates with and (with much difficulty and awkwardness) made out with. She was great though. She didn’t care that I would occasionally and “jokingly” make out with other guys at theater parties (Haha, look at us! We’re straight dudes who make out for a joke! We’re not overcompensating at all!). Nor did she break up with me when she got me a scrapbook for Valentines Day while I only got her lotion. It was perfect. Until it wasn’t.

I still remember the day she

broke up with me. Not because of the immense heartbreak, but rather the feeling of relief. Now that the girlfriend was gone I could admit it to myself that I was gay. Maybe instead of repressing it for 3 years, I should have just admitted what I couldn’t: that Drew was the one I really wanted. Coming out for me meant finding relief. The pressure buildup from hiding something like that from myself was painful. Self-deception is never worth it. Admitting who I was to myself made all the difference in my life, and whenever I need strength I look to it as the strongest thing I’ve ever done. Also, I just looked up Drew on Facebook. He still has a nice butt.

Connor Lane

I knew I was genderqueer
when I became comfortable saying
“anything said respectfully”
when people inquired about
my preferred gender pronoun.

Britney Fryer

JUST IN CARLSON

WHEN I WAS 4, I knew when I started crying at vacation bible school because the boys were being forced to make armor out of ugly brown vinyl, while the girls got to make pretty flowered wreaths.

WHEN I WAS 11, I knew when one morning at church camp, I saw an athletic older camper get out of the shower and couldn't help but look a little too openly at his naked body.

WHEN I WAS 13, I knew when a friend joked about playgirl magazine and I went home to Google Image Search.

WHEN I WAS 14, I knew when my pastor preached about open acceptance of alternative sexualities, and I knew she was talking about me.

WHEN I WAS 15, I knew when we stopped 'pretending' to be lovers among our friends and he kissed me for real.

WHEN I WAS 16, I knew when I told a friend that my long-distance girlfriend was actually a boy.

WHEN I WAS 17, I knew when the weekly sleepovers at my best friend's house stopped including much sleep.

WHEN I WAS 18, I knew when I went home to speak at my church's Christmas Eve service, told the whole room I was gay, and was set upon by four Church Elders after the service. I had grown up with them but didn't realize until that night that they all had partners who didn't attend church.

WHEN I WAS 21, I knew when I kissed a girl for the first time, and it felt like a hug.



THE BOY WITH THE CRYSTAL BLUE EYES

RUSSEL PETERSON

As it often does, it started with a boy. I was in the midst of a painfully awkward stage in my life: early adolescence. My feelings were a web of tangled desires and regrets. I lashed out at myself and others who tried to get too close to me.

I told myself every day that I was not gay. I only envied men's bodies; I did not, could not, crave them. I attempted to ignore my desire whenever an irresistibly attractive guy was in the room, telling myself that one day it will pass.

All of that changed when I noticed him for the first time. Tall, sandy blonde hair, an adorable laugh. And crystal blue eyes. Two brilliant, cerulean pools.

I never noticed another guy's eyes before.

My feelings for him exceeded the bounds of mere desire. I formed a crush—my first on a boy. This crush was not solely fixated on sex. I wanted romance. Fanfare. The beauty of a simple kiss with a lover. I had such strong feelings for a boy whom I never talked to before.

I realized then that my desires are so much more than simply sexual. My heart craves love, just not from the gender that society expects. I knew I was gay when I embraced the concept that I can both desire and love a boy simultaneously. Unfortunately, my crush moved away before I could tell him how I felt. He was, however, able to inspire this realization that has shaped my identity ever since.

bi·sex·u·al (n., adj.)

Isaiah Thomas

LIBERATING: truly appreciating **beauty** in all genders

My identity: since age 16

OUT OF THE BINARY: an **identity** that people can't peg you with

Self-questioning: on why I'm not gay or straight..wouldn't one of those be less complicated?

Less acceptance: from the gay/lesbian **community** (see also: biphobia)

Complicated: to explain to dates and partners who aren't bi

Isn't a choice: I've been this way for 11 years

Not as salient: as my ethnicity and gender

DOES NOT EQUAL: 50% *straight* and 50% gay

If I date: **3** *women* in a row, **I'm still bi**

AT THE END OF THE DAY:
SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS ONE
PART OF US, AND IT WILL NEVER
TRUMP THE CONCEPT OF
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Related forms: *bi·sex·u·al·i·ty*, *bi·sex·u·al·ly*, *me*

When I realized that I liked girls, I was afraid to come out in case I ended up being wrong.

So I told a lot of trees instead.
-Qwill Duvall



When I was 8 or 9
Years old, and
already ~~obsessed~~
with science, I read
a book about
Scientists who had
invented cures for
diseases like
Small pox and scurvy.
The last chapter was
about AIDS, for which
no cure was currently
known. The book said
that the first patients
with AIDS had

Samantha Sharpe

been "young
homosexual men." I
didn't know what
that word meant,
and I thought it
meant they had sex
at home. I looked it
up in my pocket
dictionary. I
learned a new word
5 years later, when
I fell for the girl
who sat in front of
me in Algebra, I
realized it meant
me.

There wasn't a specific moment, and if there was I don't remember it. I just knew in 6th grade. A rough patch in my schooling career, everyone was cranky and pubescent and teachers really didn't do much to alleviate things. That was also the year that I first gazed upon the man that is Jude Law. I first saw him on the cover of a gossip magazine and

The God of All Things Gay



stuck me with his arrow.

Needless to say I was in awe.

It was instant attraction.

I couldn't really describe it.

Reflecting now, I believe a lot of it had to do with the societal conceptions of beauty. That is to say, I wanted to feel attracted to someone that was considered beautiful by the general public. I also believe that it was the first time that I had ever really felt attracted to anyone...and it was a man. That's when I knew that I wasn't straight.

A+



**I SUSPECTED:
WHEN SHE STARTED
CUDDLING WITH ME.**



**I KNEW:
WHEN I WANTED TO
CUDDLE **HARDER.****



-HANNAH TREES

MY PARENTS MET EACH OTHER ON MY GRANDPARENT'S DUDE RANCH WHEN THEY WERE FIFTEEN. MY DAD TAUGHT MY MOM HOW TO RIDE HORSES.

THEY FELL IN LOVE WITH THE MOUNTAINS TOGETHER.

I SPENT EVERY SUMMER UNTIL COLLEGE ON THE RANCH. I TAUGHT MANY GIRLS HOW TO RIDE HORSES. SOME LED TO ROMANCES. BUT I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE MOUNTAINS ALONE.

I KNEW I WAS GAY WHEN I WATCHED BROKE-BACK MOUNTAIN WHEN I WAS EIGHTEEN. I COULDN'T STOP CRYING BECAUSE I KNEW I HAD BEEN KIDDING MYSELF ALL ALONG.

when i went to college i
crushed on a lot of boys
during freshman year.
but i never told one of
them that i liked them.
when i started falling for
a female friend, i knew i
had to say something. i
knew it wasn't going away
and that no one could
make it disappear. i knew
i didn't want it to go away.
i knew it was
real.

diana fraser



I ALWAYS KNEW THAT I WAS STRAIGHT.



THEN SHE CAME ALONG. SOME OF MY FRIENDS FIGURED IT OUT BEFORE IT EVEN CROSSED MY MIND.



WE BOTH STAYED AT CARLETON OVER THE SUMMER, WORKING DURING THE DAY, HANGING OUT SOME EVENINGS. A GROUP OF US GOT TOGETHER FOR WEEKLY DANCING; SHE USUALLY SHOWED UP.

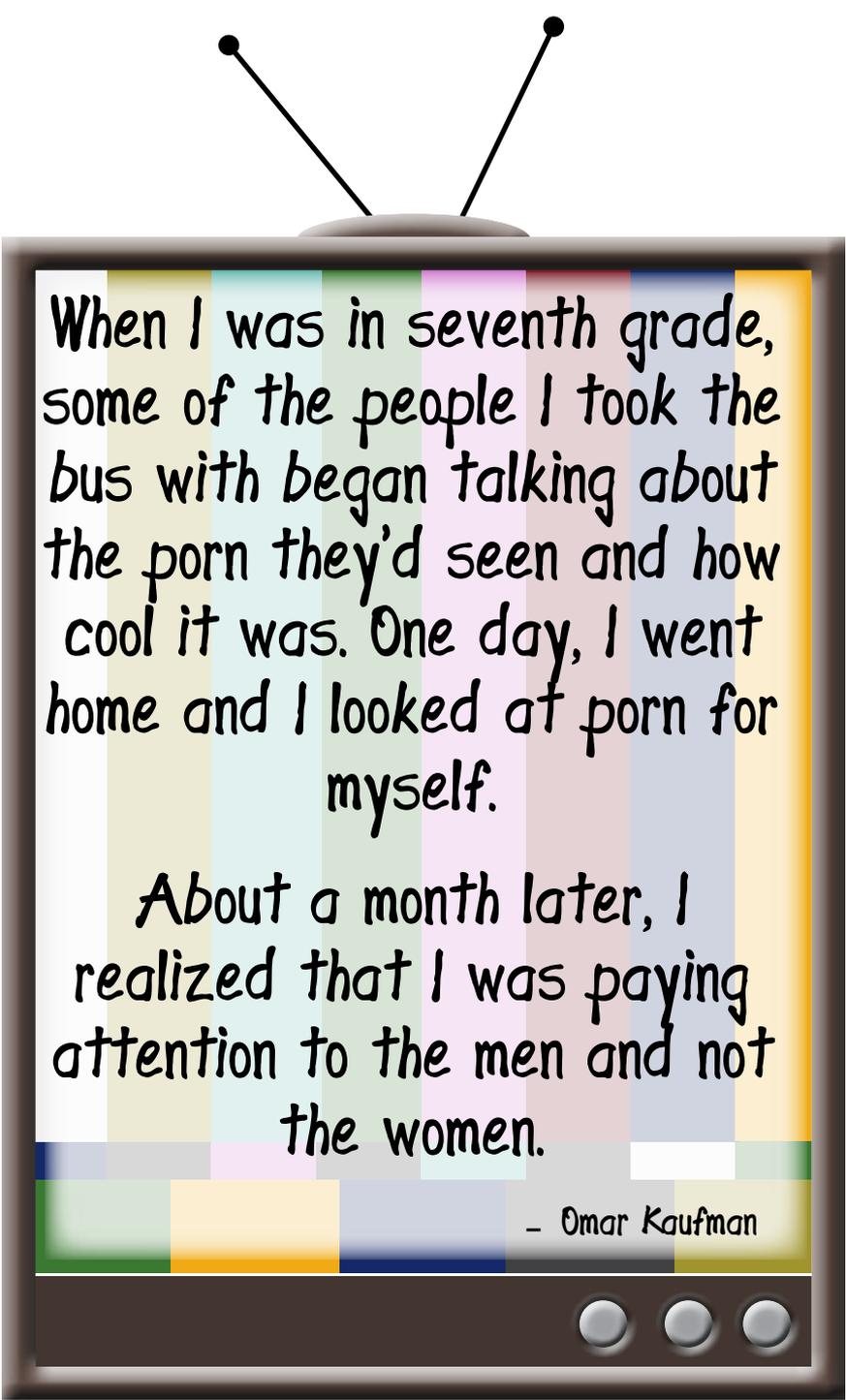


WHEN SHE LEFT CAMPUS IN THE FALL, I CAUGHT MYSELF DAYDREAMING ABOUT DANCING WITH HER AGAIN. WINTER CAME, AND WE DANCED. I KEPT DANCING OFF-TEMPO, BUT THAT WASN'T WHY I WAS **BLUSHING.**

A COUPLE OF GIRL-CRUSHES LATER, I GUESS I'M NOT SO STRAIGHT AFTER ALL.

--ERIKA OHLES





When I was in seventh grade, some of the people I took the bus with began talking about the porn they'd seen and how cool it was. One day, I went home and I looked at porn for myself.

About a month later, I realized that I was paying attention to the men and not the women.

- Omar Kaufman

I thought I had a type:
lanky, quiet, sensitive.

He was none of these.

But the more we talked,
the better I knew:

**Forget types.
I like people.**

Sarah Pinkham



0 - 17 Years Old
I am a child.



19 Years Old
I am looking at my hands and feet.
I know that I don't know. I am
nauseous and scared.



17 Years Old
I feel something wrong.
I am nauseous and scared.



20 Years Old
I am still questioning.



18 Years Old
My doctor tells me that I may not
be able to have children. There
may be a surgery, pending a test.



20 Years Old
I am hardcore questioning.



18 Years Old
I am recovering from surgery
and watching cartoons.

20 Years Old
I realize I know, and I figure
I will adopt. I am relaxed and
happy. I have another test.



19 Years Old
My doctor tells me that I may not
be able to have children. There
may be a surgery, pending a test.



21 Years Old
My doctor tells me that I
am fully capable of having
children. I agree.

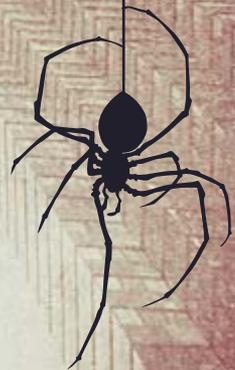
-Dan McAlister

**I knew I was queer
because of the movie**

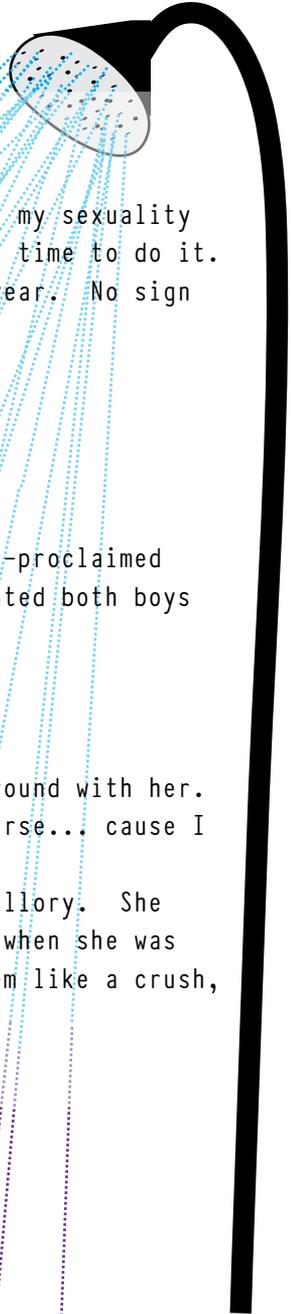
Spiderman

**I saw the movie three times in
theaters, but not because it was
well acted, had a driving plot,
or otherwise blew my mind.**

**I went because
James Franco
got shirtless.**



Isaac Werner



When I knew I was straight:

One day around age 13 I decided to figure out my sexuality while taking a shower. Seemed like the right time to do it. I'd had a crush on the same boy for about a year. No sign of girl crushes.

Evidence points to straight. Let's go with that.

When I knew I was *not* straight:

In high school I met Mallory. She was a self-proclaimed bisexual. She explained to me how she had dated both boys and girls.

Wait, you can do that?

We became friends. I really liked hanging around with her. But NOT because she flirted with me... of course... cause I was straight... of course... yeah...

My friend Cassie developed a huge crush on Mallory. She explained to me in great detail how she felt when she was around her. I was confused. That didn't seem like a crush, that was how I felt around Mallory too.

Oh wait. Damn.



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 Hannah Comstock-Gay
 Sophie Greene
 Elise Gurney
 Jonathon Hughes
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 Madeline Muzzi
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