When I Knew...
We started this project with a pretty simple idea – when and how do we discover our sexuality? Granted, the idea wasn’t really ours, and it isn’t exactly a complex one, but it’s something that is a window into the queer community and experience here at Carleton. When we talk with each other about being queer and our own personal experiences with it, our stories inevitably begin with how we figured “it” out, whether it was a deeply personal experience or something that we should have known for a long time. That’s what we hope you get out of this book – everyone here has experiences like these at Carleton, and we hope that this is a good way to showcase a few of them from our community.

Obviously, we’ve received a lot of help in bringing such a big project together. First and foremost, thanks to the producers of the original When I Knew book for the idea and the inspiration. Thanks to Kaaren William-
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Most of all, thanks to everyone who submitted their stories – it’s not always easy to place when you “knew,” and it’s never easy to share such personal parts of yourself. We hope you got as much out of writing your stories as we did in reading them.

-Justin Smith, Sarah King, Kjerstin Johnson, Dominic Vendell
Editing Team

- Cat Ward, ‘11
- Christi Conkling, ‘09
- Dominic Vendell, ‘09
- Jedda Foreman, ‘08
- Jonelle Carerra, ‘10
- Justin Smith, ‘09
- Kjerstin Johnson, ‘08
- Kristin Ginger, ‘08
- Lily Betke-Brunswick, ‘11
- Mandy Zoch, ‘10
- Sarah King, ‘09

Design Team

- Anna Decatur, ‘08
- Ashley Kardel, ‘08
- Cat Ward, ‘11
- Dominic Vendell, ‘09
- Em Harris, ‘08
- Emily Litwin, ‘09
- John Vigeland, ‘09
- Justin Smith, ‘09
- Kat Zerebiec, ‘09
- Ken Geiger, ‘09
- Kjerstin Johnson, ‘08
- Mal Hoffman, ‘08
- Michael Lane, ‘08
- Nate Ryan, ‘10
- Nou Her, ‘08
- Rachel Teagle, ‘08
- Sarah King, ‘09
- Wain Yee, ‘07
Growing up in rural western South Dakota all of the men I knew wore tight Wrangler jeans. I remember at a rodeo when I was in elementary school I asked my mom why cowboys wore such tight pants. She asked me what I thought and I responded:

“Because they look so nice?”

Nate Stephens
I wish I could write a simple sentence. "I knew when I was 12." Knew what? Knew that I identify as...that's the thing. I don't exactly know.

I have breasts, ovaries and a vagina. I menstruate too frequently. I am a woman? Possibly. Sometimes I am girlie, sometimes people mistake me for a "sir". I lift weights and swear like a sailor. I am aggressive and power-hungry. I have two X chromosomes. Sometimes I think it would be cool to have a penis, shave my face and sing bass but I am certainly not a man and never wish to be one...but does that make me a woman?

I am currently dating a hottie with a Y chromosome who identifies as genderqueer. He says that he thinks of himself as a male lesbian, which is pretty cool because sometimes I like fucking a woman. I don't consider us a gay couple but I don't consider us a straight couple even though there is one penis, one vagina, two breasts and lots of amazing sex.

I knew I was ______. Straight? I feel the need to put a footnote after that statement. I am a straight woman (see Appendix A).

If you can manage to fill in that blank for me, I'd be much obliged. Until then, I'll have crushes on women, fantasies about boobs and blowjobs, sex with my lesbian boyfriend and a smile on my face.

Anonymous

Appendix A:
*except that time I slept with a woman
*except for all of those crushes on women
*except that time I dated Melissa when I was in 9th grade
*except those times when I masturbate and think about breasts and eating out other girls
*except for when, except that time and that time and...

(Appendix A goes on for pages; it is exhausting)
A male friend once said...

There was one day where I just stopped and said 'Am I gay? ... nope.' And then I continued with my day.

I then realized that I was constantly debating that very question with myself.

John's Story
When I was little, I found a **romance novel**. I knew I wanted to have sex when I felt flush inside reading the **suggestive parts**. Then I really knew when a boy I liked would **touch** my hand maybe on accident and I **felt** the same feeling.
I was sixteen, and had been kissing my best friend for two months now. My mama sat me down in my room, and began, “When I was a manager at Conoco, my job was to know everything about everyone’s lives.” This is a bad way to start a conversation with your mama. “You and [girlfriend] are more than friends, and that’s okay, and I still love you. But you can’t have sleepovers anymore.”

You win some, you lose some.

EM HARRIS
When My Roommate Knew

It was new student week and there were several times when various clubs and offices across campus were scheduled to hold info sessions. I had my intended destination (LGBT 101) circled on the schedule well in advance, but when my roommate asked where I was going, I said the climbing wall (I think she said lacrosse).

We both showed up in the GRC.
5 WHEN I WAS FIVE, I THOUGHT I WAS A BOY.

8 WHEN I WAS EIGHT, I WANTED TO BE A BOY.

11 WHEN I WAS ELEVEN, I FELL IN LOVE WITH MY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER.

She got married and changed her last name in the middle of the year. I asked her why. She said it was because she married a man.

11 WHEN I WAS ELEVEN, I KNEW I HAD TO BE A BOY.

16 WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN, I THOUGHT I WAS A LESBIAN.

18 WHEN I WAS EIGHTEEN, I KNEW I WAS A LESBIAN.

20 WHEN I WAS TWENTY, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK.

NOW I KNOW IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER.
I knew I was STRAIGHT when I was about four and asked my mom to buy a COSMOPOLITAN magazine for me.

I cut out the pictures and kept them in a plastic bin in my closet.

Anonymous
I’ve known for awhile.

There were the crushes on female friends in between (and even co-existing with) violent crushes on boys. There were the strangely charged games we’d play, in which one of us would be the boy, and we would set up elaborate romances and seductions. There was senior prom, where my friends and I made a game of how many girls I could kiss in one night. I felt comfortable enough about it to tell my friends that I was bisexual—actually attracted to girls as well as boys, not just playing around—during freshman year. I didn’t tell my parents; I figured that if I didn’t like to talk to them about how I felt about boys, there was no reason to bring up how I felt about girls.

Then, the summer before my sophomore year, my family went on vacation. I was working as an intern in an LGBT theater in Cambridge and surrounded by queer pride. I decided not to be consciously evasive of the topic if it ever came up. I wasn’t ashamed.

It came up—that is, I came out—twice in one day, once to my brother and once to my parents. I didn’t intend for it to happen that day; I didn’t wake up and think, “Hmm, today would be a good day to talk to my family about my sexual attractions.” I thought it was going to be a perfectly normal vacation day in Vancouver. But the conversational opportunities came up, so I took them.

First I told my brother. We were walking somewhere, and my parents were ahead of us by about ten feet. A pretty woman in a sports bra and workout pants jogged by, pushing a baby carriage. I turned to my brother and said, “It’s so impressive to see someone that fit after having a baby!” In characteristic style, looking to embarrass or dismiss me, he replied, “Why are you even looking?”

I thought for a moment. My brother is of a more conservative bent than the rest of my family and has shown some mild homophobia in the past. I figured it was time to see how he’d react.

“What would you say if I told you I was attracted to women, too?” I asked.

He was quiet for a moment. “Really?” he asked me.

“Yep,” I said.

More quiet. We walked a little bit more.

“Wait, so is it the same as how you like men?”

“Not exactly,” I said, and we talked about it a bit more. He took it remarkably well, and his reaction heartened me. My parents both had gay friends and relatives and had always seemed tolerant, so I wasn’t too worried about telling them when the time came, although my dad had also been mystified in almost a pejorative way about why I would work at The Theater Offensive.

It turned out it was that night at dinner. I don’t even remember the context—there was some remark about men, about me ending up with the right guy or something like that. It was clearly a joke, but even so, it made me feel a little bit annoyed. Without thinking it over too much, I said, “You know, I like women too.”
Again, silence. Everyone—my mom, my dad, and my brother who already knew—took this in. Then the conversation started back up as if nothing major had happened, as if it wasn’t a big deal. Phew, I thought. That went really well. No one brought it up again.

Fast forward six months to winter break. Trying to be a good daughter, I had promised to go out to tea with my dad for some quality bonding time. I didn’t realize that it would be the most awkward conversation of my life.

Some explanation about my father: he’s a big, loud, outgoing man, the embarrassing type, not particularly mindful of social norms. He’s also very sensitive, and gets angry easily. He loves to seem like he’s in-the-know. And talking to him about anything personal puts me on edge for some reason, probably because he and I are far too similar for comfort. Also, the gender roles in my family are reversed: Dad is a stay-at-home dad, who does the cooking, chores, and PTA stuff, while my mom is busy being a corporate lawyer and vice president. He sends me elaborate care packages. Of course, I love him very much. This does not make certain situations any easier.

Right off the bat, as soon as we sat down, Dad started grilling me about my thoughts, my plans, my future. I was just an incoming sophomore. I didn’t even know my major! There was finally a pause in the conversation, and I took a breath, hoping the examination was over. Then my dad sat back and said, “Oh, that’s what I wanted to bring up—romance!”

My heart sped up. My face grew pale. This was not something I talked to him about, ever. It made me supremely uncomfortable to know he thought of me as someone capable of romantic, not to mention sexual, aspirations. I looked at the teapot—we still had half the pot left. I tried to head the conversation off before it could get into too much depth.

“What’s going on in that department?” my dad asked.

I knew I’d have to give him something so he wouldn’t just think I was sidestepping the issue. “Oh, you know,” I laughed, “I have a crush on a boy at school, but I don’t know if he likes me, so we’ll see how that goes.” It was true, too.

“A boy? Mm, okay,” my dad nodded. He paused, then added the words that made my eyes go wide in mortification: “So...is it mostly on that side of the street these days?”

I sat and gaped at him like the proverbial deer in the headlights. I couldn’t believe he’d said that. I didn’t really know what to say to such a metaphor. I tried to keep the atmosphere light by saying, “Yeah, well, that’s all that’s going on for the moment.”

“You know, Laura,” my dad said, and I knew I wasn’t out of the woods, “people my age often make a big deal about how accepting and comfortable we are with all kinds of different lifestyles these days. But sometimes we find it harder to put into practice, especially when it comes to less mainstream things like...bisexuality.”

Please stop talking, please stop talking, I begged him in my mind. I will give anything if you stop talking now.
“Even so,” he added, “I just want you to know that your mother and I will always love and support you.”

Oh thank God, I thought. This was a good ending place, and now I had confirmation that my family approved, more or less. But he wasn’t done.

“So whoever you end up with, man or woman…”

That was all right.

“…cat or dog, mouse or squirrel…”

I almost spit out my tea.

“Daddy,” I cut in, “thank you. I love you both too. That means a lot to me. So what are your projects for the new year?”

My head was still reeling, but I thought I’d successfully gotten through the whole subject. We had nice conversation for the rest of the tea, then got in the car to come home. Dad was loath to let the bonding end, so we kept talking. That’s when it came up again.

“I just hope that whoever you end up with will know how to pull their weight in chores,” my dad said, “whether they be man or woman…horse or llama—”

You think I’m exaggerating with animals now. I’m not. My father majored in creative writing and prides himself on his unconventional speech. Apparently if I don’t settle down with a man, my choices are either a woman or, not far below, an animal out of the zoo—nothing too domestic or pedestrian for his little girl.

Again, I interrupted and steered the conversation elsewhere, and from then on, we’ve been more or less safe. Looking back on it, I know that my dad was trying to do something difficult, and he wanted to seem as hip and funny as possible while talking about a touchy subject. He may not have succeeded, but that isn’t his fault. As for me, I’m just lucky. A lot of people—maybe even most people—would not have a family who would take any sort of coming out as well as mine did. And hey, now I know that when I bring my emu girlfriend home to meet my parents, they’ll be ready.

-Laura Stratford-
I knew thanks to Burt’s Bees lipbalm.

I was sitting on my female acquaintance’s bed with half-a-dozen other people when I applied the minty, mentholary goop.

She started trying to figure out where the smell was coming from, got closer to me and sniffed my mouth.

Instinctively, I leaned in and kissed her.

on the lips.

like I meant it.

oops.
I never had an epiphany, a sudden experience that made me think to myself, ‘oh! I’m bisexual.’ I don’t remember when I first knew, when it was made clear to me that this is who I am. All I remember is knowing it, feeling that this was an intrinsic part of my identity.
I was watching Street Fighter with my mom when I was ten. After seeing the first fight scene starring Jean-Claude Van Damme, I left and went up to my room.

I locked the door.
After years of thinking that the most romantic proposal I'd ever heard was when my uncle asked my aunt to marry him in a car wash, I had my own important moment in one.

I drove down to Texas for Christmas and my Dad and I decided to go out and do dad-daughter things: replace the wiper blades and air filter on my car then get it washed.

While in the car wash my dad asked if the boy on my laptop's desktop, one of my best friends, was my boyfriend.

I said no.

He asked if I had a boyfriend.

Again, I said no.

Then he asked if I wanted a boyfriend.

Once again, a hearty no.

Then he asked if I wanted a girlfriend.

My heart skipped a beat and I panicked for a split second then took a breath and told him I already had one.

The conversation ended there but he later sent me a message telling me he loved me for who I was.

And I bet he even knows he's already met my "friend."

Christi Conkling
We never really know when we will know.

Or when we will figure it out. Sometimes it needs to slam us before we get it. I suspect that part of this is generational, and part of it is denial. And part of it is simply just not being very self-aware.

I grew up the son of a social worker. Dad was not just a practicing clinician but was also a professor of social work at the University of Denver. He and Mom were Dr. Spock adherents and raised my sister and me in the most liberal of homes. As a kid, I remember saying that I wanted Barry Goldwater for president just to get them irritated. Dad asked me why I wanted Goldwater and effectively shut me up with that question. In matters of sexuality, the folks were quite frank. We kids knew all about the birds and bees at an early age, and we knew all the clinical terms as my mother would not tolerate slang terms in the house. Whatever. I write this preface as a way to lead into why I believe it took me forever to recognize my same-sex attraction for what it was. Given the home I was in, I was, not surprisingly, told about homosexuality. And was told that it was an acceptable and normal “lifestyle” for those who were so inclined. I was even told that same-sex attraction was not uncommon with all people at given points in their lives. So, as I matured, I thought little of guys that I found attractive. Certainly not enough to act upon. And, the truth was that I also and more often found females to be attractive.

I ended up marrying at 25 and having 3 daughters over the next 15 years. During that time, I remained aware of occasional same-sex attractions, but there was still nothing that I really wished to pursue enough to cause much discomfort. As I entered my 40’s, I made a decision to lose weight and get physically active as I had been in my 20’s. As the weight came off, I spent more time at the gym and out on the road cycling. I started getting more comments on my looks, which felt good after a decade of being overweight. Also, I began to move away from the family. It was as if the better I began to look and feel, the more my wife tried to get me to stay put at home and the more I rebelled by being gone. There was no extramarital play during this time. Just time away from home and family.

So I guess that I was primed for an awakening. Interestingly, it came on the first AIDS bike ride I did, a ride from Minneapolis to Chicago. One evening after heading back to my tent after dinner, I walked by a tent where the flap was open and two guys were inside making out. And I thought “Hmm” as I walked
by. Later, I thought about that reaction and wondered why it was not “Yuck.” For the first time, I began to acknowledge interest in members of my sex. To myself. I did not act on that for another year, but once I did, everything seemed to fall into place. Ending the marriage was tough as my wife really did not understand or accept what was going on with me. Indeed she bought me some book on “male menopause” and insisted that I read it as I would see that that was what was occurring. I assured her that my sex drive was just fine, just not with her anymore, and that the hair that she thought was disappearing from my chest was actually being somewhat manscaped away by me. At work, interestingly, nobody seemed to be surprised, and I was told by several folks that there were actually bets going on as to when I would finally figure it out.

Coming out in my late 40’s was at once heartbreaking and exhilarating. I saw a therapist who said something that actually made everything make sense to me. He told me that “one cannot change their sexuality, but one’s sexuality can change over time.” This was important for me to understand because for so much of my marriage, I truly was attracted only to my wife in any serious sense and did not stray from the marriage until the last couple of years when other feelings began to emerge. I felt terrible about having these other feelings that had been there all of my life. But they were never present in a way in which I wanted to act upon them until they came to the forefront the way that they did.

“Fortunately, my feelings of same-sex attraction did come forward, and it was exhilarating for me to realize how much fun and gratifying it was to be with sexual partners built like myself.”

It has been nearly 7 years since everything “blew up.” And my life could not be better. I am in a long-term relationship with a man I could not be happier with, and my three daughters all adore their “stepmom.” While I wish that things were better between my ex-wife and me, they are tolerable and civil now, which is better than it used to be.

My partner Scott once asked my if I ever feel badly about all of the years I missed out on being gay because I was not aware of it or did not acknowledge it or because my sexuality had not changed enough or for whatever reason. I don’t. I loved the years with my wife, and I would not give up parenthood for anything. I actually feel quite grateful that my life has unfolded the way it has as I feel that over time I have gotten the best of all possible worlds. I am exactly where I want to be now. Life, all of it is good.
I was in the seventh grade, and N*SYNC was still popular. My best friend Lisa and I had stumbled across this website for erotic N*SYNC fanfiction on the internet, and we spent hours surreptitiously reading the stories and giggling at the sexy parts. Our favorite was one where Lance Bass and an adoring fan named Misty had a quickie on the changing table of a Denny’s bathroom.

I was secretly jealous of Misty.
It Took 18 Years

But

Then I Just Knew.
THE RAINBOW RETREAT
2008, Camp Pepin, Wisconsin

I grew up thinking that I would be like my mother. The way she tells it, she wasn’t attracted to any of the boys at her high school, and so she assumed she must like girls instead. She went on happily believing this until she got to college, where she met and dated men nothing like the ones she had known in small-town Kansas. All I needed, she implied, was patience: wait long enough, and heterosexual love would find me.

So, fully expecting to follow in her footsteps, I went off to Carleton. I found wonderful people here, and for the first time, I felt like I was in a place where I really belonged. Life was good. But then I met this girl. She was creative, intelligent, funny, and undeniably female. It took me a long time to realize I actually had a crush on her; I kept trying to tell myself that I just wanted to spend time with her and make myself more like her instead.

My story doesn’t have a Hollywood ending. My crush got involved with someone else, and I never told her how I felt. I stayed vaguely hetero-aseual to the outside world, while on the inside I tried to accept that I could like women as well as men and still be myself. I stayed in my personal limbo until this winter, when I finally got the courage to go on the Rainbow Retreat and announced to thirty-odd people—many of whom I had never met until that weekend—that I was queer.

That moment, when I publicly acknowledged that I am who I am, and that person is bisexual, was the final step. That’s when I really knew.

-Marjorie Harrington
I knew

I was into women when I kept reminding myself to look at men!
I can remember only vaguely what the most beautiful ballerina I’ve ever seen actually looked like. I was usually in group 3 of the advanced ballet class, due in part to my inability to memorize combinations quickly. She was in group 2. She and I alone possessed curves in a roomful of long, lanky beauties. I cannot recall her face, but I remember that she was dark and handsome, and moved with fluid grace. She danced the combinations before I did, and I would frantically try to follow along mentally. When her turn came, she would dance with our long, lanky classmates, her chestnut hair flying in wisps out of her bun. Then I would promptly forget her entirely as I tried not to be the one person in advanced ballet who screwed up the combination.

I did not dwell (much) on this infatuation at the time. I do remember thinking a few times that I found this girl attractive, and that maybe if I paid more attention, I would find other girls attractive too. It would make my head hurt when I was already preoccupied with whether I was supposed to finish in first or second arabesque, so I would let it pass. After graduating from high school, I forgot her face and her name, and her entirely, in fact.

Until I was in Intro to IR. Midway through the term I found myself staring at another dark, handsome girl sitting across the room from me. Something about how she would walk into class reminded me of my ballerina, and on this random day several years later, I realized that I was finally allowing myself to pay attention.

I wonder sometimes whether others noticed this before I did. After jokingly commenting that I need my bountiful chest reduced, one friend begged me to keep them “for the sake of my future lovers, male and female!” And my boyfriend can’t help but chuckle at my responses when, after subconsciously following a pretty woman with my eyes, he cocks his eyebrow at me and I stutter back blankly, “What? What’s that look for?”

This year at the poster sale I gave into a little craving I’ve had for awhile, and bought a “hot girl” poster to keep all my “hot guy” posters company. I’m not really out yet, so it was a risky move—my room is a much-visited social gathering spot, not to mention shown off to tour groups. But it does make an interesting conversation starter…and the conversation is one I’ve been wanting to have since I remembered the ballerina.

-Author
The first time I made love to a woman was in San Francisco in 1971.

Ruth was a campus traveler for New University Conference (NUC), a New Left organization of academics. We met briefly at a NUC conference where I learned of her group that helped women get (illegal) abortions. I contacted her a month later when I thought I needed that help, but I got my period before needing her help. A year and a half later, when she told me she’d be passing through town, I invited her to stay overnight at my collective. ▼ We spent April 17, 1971 at Golden Gate park at the last big anti-Vietnam war march, where we “just happened” to march with the lesbian and gay contingent. Active in the Women’s Liberation Movement for three years, I had been trying to come out for nine months, which we referred to as “moving right along.” ▼ Ruth and I spent the late afternoon walking around town—talking and talking. Finally we arrived back at my room in the women’s collective. Soon we were lying together on my bed, still talking and talking, while I furiously combed my mind for how to move things forward. Eventually, I turned my head and kissed her on the lips. We didn’t know what to do, but we figured it out soon enough. ▼

The next day I declared myself a lesbian.
It wasn’t when I knew but rather when I let myself know. Sometime in late middle school or early high school I started to avoid doing things that would tip people off that I was gay. But I wasn’t gay—I couldn’t be. That’s for other people. I just didn’t want to seem gay. Yeah, that’s it. I was definitely straight. But why wasn’t I attracted to one of the gorgeous girls that I was friends with? And why did I get excited on some level when I saw a guy that I thought was gay? Why was I so determined to keep people from knowing—I mean thinking—I was gay? It wasn’t that I couldn’t put the pieces together; I just refused to. Then I came to Carleton. I got out of a small, closed-minded town. I wasn’t surrounded by Bible-thumpers. I made gay friends. I had a chance to start fresh. To be myself. But I still refused to know. It wasn’t until I was at home that first winter break that I gave up denying. There was a boy. There was a crush. It sealed the deal.

I let myself know.

I realized I could have feelings for a male and be okay with that. I didn’t tell the boy, though. I’ve only told a few people. But I’m getting there.

-Anonymous-
My parents are a gay male couple.

I have a little brother who came out when he was fourteen.

The night after he told us, I sat my family down and told them

I was straight.

Anonymous
It’s been six years ago that I realized I was gay. Here’s why this surprises me: because, when I think of the pivotal events in my life, so many of them are connected with this seventh-grade realization, but seventh grade didn’t even happen a third of my life ago. I came out to my parents in tenth grade, and I came out at school in eleventh grade, and so I guess if my coming-out shoes were a child, they would already know how to talk and would have teeth.

The perspective this gives me now is one of looking back. I think people feel ominous by saying, “The coming-out process is never over,” at least until people stop assuming you’re straight unless you tell them otherwise. For me though, coming out feels finished. I think a lot of this is that I’ve really been very blessed, and this is what I see when I look back. Coming out was the very hardest thing I’ve ever done. But no matter how hard it was, my parents love me and cherish me, and my friends have never deserted me, and so I know I’m lucky. I’ve only gotten homophobiaed any sort of way one time. I’ve grown up in this world where I’m either not exposed or just oblivious to a lot of horrible things, where here at Carleton the absolute worst I’ve come up against is “gay-ass tests” and homosexual airport layovers in Atlanta.

Part of me feels guilty about this sometimes, that I got it easier than a lot of people, because there is so much horribleness that happens. I think this horribleness that happens, it’s hard for me to identify with sometimes, because that part of things for me feels done, and today I am gay, and that hasn’t seriously bothered my life. I haven’t forgotten, but that’s not where I am right now. Sometimes this makes me feel guilty.

Part of me wants to say then, “Is that okay, that it’s been a long time since being gay made me depressed, and is that okay, that today I am happy with who I am, and is this okay, that I maybe don’t want to be an activist and I just want to live normally?” I’m gay, but I’m not having any serious problems with that. I’m just here. It’s not that I understand everything, and it’s not that I’m never worried or sad about things, but I’m really doing fine. Is that an okay thing to say? I’m just going to go with “yes.” Yes, that is an okay thing to say.

Today, the gay part inside of me is like a very old man who has lived for a long time and is looking back. Even though I’m always changing, I don’t feel like anything else huge is going to happen with my sexuality. Maybe it will, but right now, it just feels like a very old man in a rocking chair. For the record, I’d just like to register that I am gay, and I’m doing quite well.

This is a lovely feeling.

· JIMMY DREESE ·
One time when my high school girlfriend and I were making out, she looked at me and asked, "Are we gay?"

It was significant that I was not only very naïve but also felt it necessary to hide my own questions regarding our sexual orientations.

"No," I said, "only boys can be gay." We left it at that.
I knew I was queer when I wanted to kiss my second grade teacher because she looked like Whitney Houston.

I thought she was so beautiful – everytime she talked to me I got nervous.

-Angelica Johnson
I have never really thought about being gay or straight.

I just knew that I liked girls and didn’t feel the same way about boys.

I never attached or thought about attaching the label gay, straight, or bi to myself; it just seems strange.

I AM WHO I AM.

DAN LEVY
I knew that I wanted to be an ally soon after my best friend came out during his junior year of high school. We were both on the cross-country team. Before he came out I felt, I thought, comfortable with homosexuality, and had no problem challenging blatant bigots on their homophobic views. But speaking up for a friend to another friend I found to be a completely different challenge; when I had done it, I understood that to me, being an ally entailed being able to challenge homophobic comments made by close friends less out of hatred (I choose to hope) than out of ignorance.

One day in the locker room as we were getting on our short-shorts in preparation for a workout together, an upper classmen on the team told me that he felt a little uncomfortable changing in front of a gay man because he didn’t want to be watched.

“Do you think that every girl is attractive?” I asked him.

“Well, no. Of course not,” he said.

“What makes gay guys any different?” I asked confidently (having been involved in a somewhat tense conversation on this very subject a few days earlier by my best friend). “It’s not like because you’re gay you’re automatically attracted to every man. So,” I added, “It’s not like you have anything to worry about.” He smiled a little nervously at his bristled pride and headed outside just as my newly out best friend came through the door.

-Sam Ritter-
When I woke up on my bedroom floor with the faint memory of having drunkenly kissed a girl and I knew I wanted to do it again sober.
In a way it’s a love story about a boy who grew up in a large family where he learned to love and to be loved. And he was happy…. for a while. But all was not well, for he was learning that while people talked about loving other people, they only meant some other people. It seemed it was all right for boys to have girl-friends, and girls to have boyfriends, and even girls could have girlfriends, but boys were never to have boyfriends.

When the boy went to college, he soon became friends with another boy who was also studying geology, and they began to do many things together—even spending summers together working in the mountains. They were both Christians, and taught a Sunday school class together, and spent many hours talking and talking. Gradually the boy realized that he was in love with his friend, which frightened him very much, and he prayed that God would change him. He didn’t know what he had done to become the way he was, but he knew that it must have been very bad.

Then one day the boy’s friend came to him with exciting news: he was in love with a girl who was a friend to both of them! Now the boy was very confused and sad. Once more he tried to talk to God, but it didn’t seem that God was listening. He began to walk in front of cars on the highway by the woods, hoping they would take him away from his pain.
Finally the boy decided that he needed to leave, and so he went to Latin America. The hurt was less now, and while he still prayed to be changed, he began to feel that maybe he was just meant to never have anyone to love.

And so the years passed, and sometimes it hurt very much, and sometimes not so much. His friend married the girl and the boy was the best man; then they moved away and the boy went to the mountains to live. Once more it was hurting too much, and so the boy decided that he must find a way to change or he could not go on living with the pain. After three months, the boy got up enough courage to visit the village pastor, someone he admired very much. He summoned his courage, looked at the pastor and said, “What I want to know is if you believe in healing for homosexuals?”

There. He had finally said it. Someone knew. Even if he changed now, someone would always know. He had never felt so naked, so exposed, so vulnerable. Or so honest. Yes, he felt vulnerable, but to his surprise he felt a huge weight lifted from him—finally the ball was in the other court. Even if the pastor said “No,” or got angry, he felt now he could die in peace—at least the horrible truth was no longer bottled up inside.

And then he found that God’s grace often comes in unexpected packages. The pastor looked at him without even batting an eye and calmly said, “That depends on whether there is a brokenness.”

The boy was stunned. Could Revelation, the Gospel, and the Good News really come through eight simple words? Could 23 years of perspective be stood on end so simply, so calmly? They were. The boy finally received and experienced the grace he had heard about for so long. He finally understood the metanoia, the turn-around. Suddenly those oft-repeated words became real to him, central to his very being: “Nothing can separate me from the love of God.”
My mother had left me unattended to watch another movie on Lifetime: Television for Women. The mysterious hero of "Kiss of Death" was stripping in front of the camera, and I couldn't take my eyes off of him.

Along with the heroine of the film, he removed all of his clothing item by item until he was naked from the waist up. Before I could take it all in, the camera cut to his backside gyrating on the bed and into my living room, capturing my undivided attention. I wanted him to touch me, but I lacked a sexual script to transform that desire into fantasy. Suddenly, I realized that my stepfather's eyes were on me, a little boy who was looking a little too hard and a little too long at a naked man.

So I waited until I went to bed to fantasize and then I knew. DOMINIC VENDELL
In the summer after sixth grade, I decided to tell my best friend, Molly, what I had by that time known for a while. We were roughhousing in my basement, as we always did, when I quite suddenly stated in a rather straightforward manner:

"Molly, I'm gay."

I regretted saying it as soon as it came out, and feeling embarrassed I dove under a nearby comforter. She laughed and told me to come out.

I told her I already did.

-Taylor Young
Oddly enough, some of my most vivid memories of childhood are from the time I was in kindergarten: singing songs with guitar-pickin’ Sister Pat, going down the big-kid slide for the first time (head first...ouch!), watching the domestic horses that roamed the ranch-property that bordered our playground. Looking back, it was also the first time I started having feelings for other boys. I don’t think there was anything out of the ordinary about my friendships with other boys; they were close and playful as they should’ve been. I remember one time when a friend and I were playing by the water fountain. I don’t remember anyone else around, just the two of us. For some reason we kissed each other on our lips. Maybe we were curious about it because we had seen other people do it; I don’t know. I didn’t know then that I was gay; however, I would learn that a bit later in life, still as a young child. About ten feet away from the water fountain (if I remember the layout of the area correctly), there was a statue of the Virgin Mary carrying the infant Christ, which had a brightly painted carapace that was slightly cracked at its edges, holding vigil over the room. It didn’t matter where you stood, as long as you could see their faces, their eyes followed you. I didn’t feel shame then (as a child in kindergarten), but I eventually learned it well. I wonder now, as I studied their fixating eyes, if they knew what I knew.
When my best friend sat me down on her bed and told me I had a crush on a girl

I wanted to punch her in the face, but I knew.

Practice @ 3:30