

## Anything but a "Real Man"

I'm a married male in my early thirties. A little over two years ago after living a life in which my attractions were solely and genuinely for women, I began to experience a tremendous amount of doubt about my sexual identity, made manifest in the form of what appeared to be a sudden attraction to men. From puberty until the age of thirty one my attractions were entirely for women and my waking and dream life was populated by fantasy encounters with them and my actual sexual encounters with them, among which there were a good many, were entirely enjoyable. I fell madly in love with a handful of them and dreamed of one day getting married and having children. Finally my dream of marriage was realized as I'd met the woman of my dreams and yet oddly enough a little over a year after we were married, questions of my sexual identity and my past began emerge and there hasn't been a day since that I haven't questioned myself relentlessly, searching desperately for an answer to why this has occurred and mourning the passing of my "self," whomever that may be, the hurt this has caused my wife and the general mess of things I seem to have made in not having discovered any of this earlier.

With the onset of this growing attraction to men I began to question all that I'd come to know and love about myself as a man in the years prior. This scared the hell out of me as I'd only just been married for little over a year. For about two months I suffered an agonizing bout of insomnia, depression, extreme anxiety and loss of appetite. I lost twelve pounds. Since then I have been taking antidepressants which have helped some but I know they are only a temporary solution to the turmoil I feel as a result of this identity crisis I seem to be having. I love my wife dearly and very much wanted to start a family with her. Once I began to feel this attraction to men suddenly appear in my life, my strong attraction to women began to diminish considerably and my sex life with my wife ceased to exist. I felt a vague kind of terror and physical repulsion toward the idea of sex with her and I couldn't put a finger on it. I'd experienced this briefly in my past sexual relations with women. On a handful of occasions I recall a vague sense of terror washing over me either before or after having sex with these women. Just prior to having met my wife I'd been in a casual relationship with a woman and on one night in particular after having had sex I recall an uncontrollable trembling in my belly that kept me up all night and left me nauseous and exhausted the following day. My wife and I have since separated as a result of not only the issues I have run up against, but similar issues she is having. I know that her childhood was very similar to mine in that her needs were entirely ignored and she grew up with a very poor image of herself in relation to others. At any rate, I digress, I know I've got to get down to the bottom of my issues as she has hers until we can resolve the problems we've experienced as a couple.

Having been raised by a single mother who used me solely as an object to meet her own emotional needs is something I've only recently begun to recognize as extremely harmful to the healthy formation of my self-esteem and my ability to relate on an intimate basis with others. From the onset of this identity crisis a good many memories from the past have come to the surface, such as the fact that she and I shared the same bed until I was ten. Until I was ten years old I had no room of my own. That she continued to bathe me until then and on a handful of occasions took photographs of me naked in the tub. In addition she treated me as a surrogate spouse, a situation in which I had no personal boundaries. Complicating that was the fact that she showed little interest in my emotional well being and merely met my physical needs for food, shelter and the like. On my ninth birthday I recall being very upset that she'd not even said happy birthday, let alone mentioned the prospect of doing anything for my birthday. When I asked her about it she flew into a fit of rage, stormed out of the house and returned with a handful of party favors and a cake. She threw them angrily on the coffee table and chastised me for having "made such a fuss," which she followed up with a statement of how much she'd spent in order to satisfy my outlandish demand: twenty dollars. To this day she gives me little room to speak and when she does, what I have to say is usually discounted. On a handful of occasions, both over the phone and in her presence, while in the midst of our regularly heated arguments I've been shocked to find myself with an erection. In addition, my immediate family dynamic was characterized by alcoholism, drug addiction and extreme emotional, mental and physical violence. Both my grandfather and my uncle were entirely unequipped to deal with the domineering nature of both my grandmother and my mother and their typical response was to escape the madness through alcohol and isolation, leaving me alone to make sense of it all. Finally, I did not meet my father until I was seventeen and had no contact with him until that point. No phone calls, no letters, no birthday cards, nothing. As per any other memories that have come up I have none. No recollection of overt sexual abuse, but having only recently begun to see the above memories rise to the surface I can only wonder what else might have happened to me.

As far as my relationships with others are concerned, I've typically had an extremely difficult time making friends. Finding myself alone in life, yet again, the prospect of getting out there and meeting new people is nothing short of terrifying. I experience a great deal of tension physically, I find myself startled whenever I'm touched by somebody without their permission and I seem to have developed extremely rigid patterns of interaction with others, that leave me feeling entirely lifeless and numb inside. One of my wife's major complaints about me is that I'm emotionally vacant,

uncommunicative, lacking in spontaneity, passion and joy for living and that I do not love her. Oddly enough my mom says the same things about me and I feel like an all out and utter failure in my relationships with women at the moment. I realize now that they've always terrified me and in order to secure their affections I've developed patterns of extreme submission to their needs, entirely ignoring my own in the process.

In trying to piece this all together I realize the above circumstances only scratch the surface of what I believe to be a vast reservoir of damage done me as a child and that there is a good deal yet left to discover about myself. Perhaps I'm grasping for straws here and none of this is unusual, but I suspect that it has a great deal to do with why I have begun to experience confusion over my sexuality and why my relationships with others are tense at best.

I've begun to realize that most my life I never felt like a "real man" whatever that may be. The stereotypical macho, sports loving, confident, sexually voracious, successful image seems to be what I have failed to live up to. I realize it is bullshit, but somehow the image seems to haunt me, ever reminding me that I am anything but a "real man." I have tried long and hard to embody those qualities within myself; however the result has been nothing short of a counterfeit masculinity where little genuine masculinity seems to exist, leaving me feeling as though I'm nothing short of defective as a man. I desperately desire to find resolution to these problems and discover within myself the genuine sense of masculinity I have for so long sought and yet failed to find within myself. I desperately desire to feel the strong sexual desire I once had for women. I don't know where it's gone and I'm beginning to wonder whether it was authentic to begin with.

Thankfully I am a recovered alcoholic, having spent the past eight years in Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm grateful to have been gifted with sobriety and been presented with a program of recovery which has not only relieved me of the desire to drink, but revealed to me that my drinking was but a symptom of an entire complex of issues that I've slowly begun to discover in sobriety.

Anonymous