

PART ONE: OH, BOY!

I'd always wanted to be a boy. Always. One of my earliest memories from childhood is my desire to be a boy. I wasn't comfortable being a girl or playing with the things girls played with. I'd rather jump my bike over ramps, climb trees, go digging for worms, play football, and all those other cool things boys did. For most of my childhood, I only hung out with boys; I considered them much better to be around than girls. I dressed, acted and took on all the mannerisms of a boy.

My desire to be a boy increased as I was growing up, yet I realized that these thoughts were not correct according to what I saw and heard from others girls my age, from my parents, relatives, and society. I struggled mightily to keep my thoughts hidden, most especially from my parents. To me, my desire to be a boy wasn't right for reasons I couldn't explain. I had a special "moral compass"—that I was unaware of—that lead me to believe these desires were just plain wrong. My discomfort with my thoughts, feelings, and desire to be a boy was increasing every day as I grew older.

So there I was, cruising along in my childhood, hanging with the boys and doing the things that boys do. Some girls are tomboys, and there's nothing wrong in that. But I was different: every inch of me, my whole heart and soul, wanted to be boy with all the accompanying parts and accessories. The word "disappointment" does not even begin to describe how I felt because I could not be "like" the boys I knew.

Take that desire and mix in the ingredients of a very shy, insecure, quiet, sensitive, "bury the emotions" and "don't stir the waters" personality of a young child and adolescent. Add two cups of the blessing (and the curse) of a very creative mind. Put all that together, stir until well internalized, bake for several years, and you get the unique character of my particular inclination toward same-sex attraction (SSA). Growing up, I lived my SSA mostly "in my head" and did not act on my desires until I was older, and then only once.

I turned inward to imagine that I could be what I always wanted to be. I started living my most secret and desired life in my head. In my secret fantasy life, I did have all the physical parts of a boy, and I did heroic, wonderful deeds to save others, things that the men I admired did in books or on TV. This secret life was steaming along regardless of the moral twitches I may have felt but didn't understand at the time. As long as I kept it hidden, my life was good and carefree until . . . PUBERTY!

About the fifth grade, I realized that I was attracted to girls: Not because I wanted to hang out with them and start doing the girly things they were doing, but because I was attracted to them physically. My secret life did a 90° turn. I still did heroic and wonderful things as a boy or man to save mankind, but now my daydreams started focusing more on women. I did great things to impress them and so become a woman's boyfriend. My sexuality was awakening.

All through junior high and high school, my fantasy life continued while, in the real world I went through the normal angst and troubles of a teenager. I think it was when that I first heard the term "homosexuality." Up to that point, I'd never realized that there was a label attached to my struggles. I started listening to what society had to say about homosexuality: I heard that it was not good; it was a stigma on humanity. Hearing all this, I dug my hole deeper, trying to bury my little secret because man oh man, people did not like homosexuals! I felt very alone. I thought

that I must be the only person on the face of this earth who'd ever felt this way about other women.

In high school, my desire for an intimate relationship with someone of the same sex surfaced in a more sexual way. Since I now knew that this attraction to other women was not "right" (my compass was still pointing south about that), I retreated to my fantasy life focusing on a woman I was attracted to at the time, always taking on the role of the male in the relationship. To fight this desire, I decided to try dating a boy, hoping to kill my secret attraction to women, but I was never comfortable with kissing, holding hands or trying to have a boy / girl relationship. The relationships I had in my head seemed better, safer and happier than the real thing. I eventually had relationships with two other men, including sexual intimacy, but still my SSA desires did not end. I felt alone with my SSA struggles, but I never got to the point where I wanted to "end it all": I loved life too much. Again, that moral compass, maybe, helped me in spite of my inner turmoil.

PART TWO: THE AWAKENING

I am a convert to the Catholic faith. My mom was Lutheran and my dad is Catholic—neither practiced their faith when I was growing up. My older sister was baptized in the Lutheran faith and my younger brother was baptized in the Catholic faith. As for me, I wasn't baptized in any faith. I had some vague concept of God, Jesus and what a church was for, but nothing stuck. God wasn't even a passing thought in my life for so many years. But God never let me out of His thoughts. And He came a-knocking at my door when I took my first job.

One of my coworkers in the fast food restaurant was Susan. She was constantly teased or gossiped about concerning her weight and, as I was to learn later, about her religious beliefs. I noticed something about Susan: she kept her calm and peacefulness through it all. That sense of peace—and God—drew me to her. Always struggling with my SSA, I longed to be at peace. I asked Susan how she could remain so "mellow" with all the commotion that went on around her. She told me God was giving her strength and peace through her faith in Him. And then she invited me to come to her church to see and learn more about her faith.

So, with Susan at my side, I attended my very first Catholic Mass. As soon as I walked through those doors, sat in the pew and took in all my surroundings, I thought to myself "I am at home." I never felt as sure of myself as I did that day. I knew the Catholic Faith was going to be my faith and I wanted to join up as quickly as possible! In the next several weeks, Susan and I spent a lot of time together as she answered my questions about God, church, Catholicism, and faith. I longed to get to know God; it felt as if I was finally discovering something that was missing from my life.

A few weeks later I signed up for the RCIA courses at Susan's church, St. Mary's, Queen of Creation, and Susan graciously served as my sponsor or as I like to call her, my "God-mama." One of the happiest days of my life was the Easter Vigil of 1989 when I was officially baptized, confirmed and took Jesus's body into my own body, into my very soul. The next few years were years of excitement as I learned more about my Catholic faith, God and the Church's teachings and as I became involved in Church activities. A big hole in my life was being filled with God's people, surrounding and supporting me with prayer. Of course, I didn't let anyone know of my struggles with SSA. I was afraid that these good Christian friends would judge me harshly.

Besides, I thought, my SSA was between me and God. I put my life in His hands and said that He could decide whatever He wanted me to do, whether it was the single life, the married life, or a religious vocation. I wanted Him to direct and guide me so I would serve Him the best as I could in spite of my SSA. I briefly thought I had a religious vocation, but that was not to be. He had other plans for me.

PART THREE: IGNORING THE MORAL COMPASS IN A BIG WAY

While I was excited and happy about all that was going on in my real life, the deep, dark cloud of SSA still had control of my fantasy life. The more I grew in my faith the more I knew my SSA was not right and not of God. The "discomfort," the "just not right" feeling that I have always had toward my SSA, even as a child, was placed in my soul when I was created. God gave me a double dose of a moral compass as well as tons of future graces when I was created in my mother's womb.

Maybe we all have this "moral compass" placed in our soul when we are created. Regardless, I was really beginning to not like that SSA part of myself. But even with all the teachings, the morality, what I read in the Bible, my growing faith, and my inborn sense of what God wanted, I still could not shake my desires. So far, I'd never acted out my SSA inclinations with another woman. Instead, I continued to enjoy my fantasy relationships, certainly in part due to my insecurities and "don't stir the waters" personality.

There was another reason I'd never acted on my desires. One day, when I was in high school, I thought I was finally brave enough to let somebody else in on my little secret. I told my mom. We were standing at the kitchen counter and, while looking down, I said "I think I'm gay." My mom turned and looked at me with the angriest face I have ever seen and said in a low voice, "Oh, no, you are not." I gulped and thought to myself "Okayyyy. I am NOT gay." That was the end of that "heart to heart" talk; I turned and left the kitchen. I had a healthy, fearful respect for my mother and she figuratively put "the fear of God" in me. I do believe her response contributed to my never acting on my SSA for almost half of my adult life and also kept me from falling into the lifestyle. God sure does know what He's doing, eh?

Fast forward a few years to what I consider a lost, confused part of my life when, in my thirties, I went ahead and did something regardless of what I knew was wrong. I met a woman I was really attracted to and took the dive: I acted out all those fantasies that I'd been playing in my head for years. I was in heaven. I was in hell. The irony of the situation was that this other woman, a very prayerful Christian woman, knew of my SSA struggles. For her, our relationship was more of an experiment or a response to loneliness. And you know what it was all about for me. The physical aspect of that relationship lasted about six months before I put the brakes on. I did not want to drag another person down to my sinfulness, risking her soul as well as mine.

PART FOUR: GOD SENDS COURAGE

After this, my life was cruising along. I was trying my very best to live for God and in God, trying to follow the direction He was leading me. Still, I struggled with my SSA: it just wasn't going away. I knew the triggers that would make these feelings more intense at certain times, but as much as I tried to avoid them, they'd come around and my fantasy life would kick in again.

I started asking God, "Why, why, why? Why do I have these SSA desires?" I thought I'd had a happy childhood without any physical or sexual abuse. I'd had no other traumatic experiences. I thought my prayer life was going okay, and I'd even started working for the Dominican Sisters at their retreat house. With things going well in other areas of my life, I really started hammering God with the "why, why, why" question. I was tired of trying to walk in faith with Him and yet have these immoral thoughts and desires plaguing me.

Then came a crucial moment: I just gave up in trying to control this part of my life. I gave it all over to God, tied up with a pretty red bow. All yours, God. But let's backtrack a moment. Roughly about five years before I turned my SSA over to God, I'd come across the Courage website while doing research for a college paper. I vaguely remembered hearing about the Courage apostolate in the past, but I'd never pursued that arena in my struggle with SSA. I really didn't believe that I needed any support system or any psycho babble. My SSA was between me and God. I just gathered the quotes I needed and the Courage website address to use in my paper. Then totally forgot about it. Or so I thought. God had planted the seed.

Once I caved in and decided to let God do His work in this area of my life, the Courage website I'd explored years ago again popped into my head. It was God's grace that I remembered Courage and its ministry to those persons struggling with SSA. The seed God planted was beginning to bloom within me. I went back to the World Wide Web to find the Courage, figuratively and literally, to get help with my struggles.

I spent a lot of time on the Courage website the day I rediscovered it. I wanted to read about others who have lived/overcome SSA and about pastoral advice in the articles and blogs. I was searching for answers to my "why" question. But as much as I read, nothing really answered the question that wouldn't let me go. I still felt alone despite reading other people's stories—none were the same as mine. I'd lived my SSA primarily in my head and, with that one exception, I didn't live an active homosexual lifestyle. But I didn't give up. I kept on returning. I kept on praying.

Then one day, the site published information about the annual Courage Conference. I read all the information and thought "Hmmm. Should I?" And the answer from God was immediate: I should go. With encouragement from friends, I signed up. It was at that Courage conference that I first received one of many of God's healings that were to take place in my life over the next four years. I can't remember what workshops I attended, their topics or the keynote speeches. That was not the reason I was there. The reason God sent me was to learn that I was NOT alone in my struggle with SSA! I'd built up a big wall my entire life by believing I was the only one, or one of a very small minority, who suffered from a more "quiet" form of SSA. I met, face to face, real people who, like me, desired a "normal" life. If that wasn't possible, then they wanted, like me, to learn how to cope with SSA as a part of their lives as they were. God got out His "Time to Heal" hammer and started knocking down my wall.

God used another woman at the conference as a means to knock down the last of that wall. Some of us would gather outside our conference dorm after the sessions were over just to enjoy the air, talk with friends or meet new ones with whom to share our stories and advice. On this night, I sat next to a woman; we introduced ourselves and started sharing our own SSA struggles with each other. I started explaining how I felt I was the only one on this earth who'd ever struggled with my form of "quiet" SSA: never really lived the lifestyle and only once acted upon my desires.

She looked at me with astonishment and said: "Oh my gosh, me too! I kept it all in my head, too!" Her SSA struggles mirrored mine almost exactly, right down to our belief that our SSA struggles were unique among fellow sufferers. I spent the remainder of the conference in awe, surrounded by those who were also trying to get back to a "normal" life or to cope with their SSA according to God and Church teachings.

It was a wonderful conference. By letting the "cat out of the bag" and for the first time sharing my struggles with others who also experienced unwanted SSA, I was starting on that road to peace.

PART FIVE: FINALLY! A STORMY ANSWER

A few weeks later, with a smile still plastered on my face from the Courage conference, I went down to Florida to visit my dad. God knocked my feet out from underneath me and completely erased that "high" that I was riding. I was forced to look at my family, myself and the possible psychological effects that may have led to my SSA.

I had a heart to heart talk with my stepmother one night, opening up to her about my SSA struggles and why I'd never felt comfortable with it, never wanted to identify myself by those struggles. I was too scared to open up to my dad, given the reaction my mom gave all those years ago, despite the fact my dad is the most laid-back, roll with the punches kind of man. My stepmother said that she would take me the way I am, that she would love me regardless of whether I was "gay" or not. Well, that was comforting—and I love her for her acceptance—but in other ways, it wasn't comforting. Like so many in our society, she missed the part about me *not wanting* to be "gay."

After that little revelation, we talked about my "why" question. No sexual abuse, happy childhood, semi-normal life—blabbity-blah. Then I said something in passing—something I don't wish to reveal here—that totally changed things. The conversation turned from a happy, comforting one, to one that I thought might actually put my family life in danger. Oh God! This is not what I wanted! After having this wonderful conversation, why did I have to blow it by not paying attention to what I was saying?

I was panicking with my whole heart and mind. We both said our good nights and went to bed. Thus began the "dark night of my soul" and, in the morning, a semi-answer to my "why" question. I rarely cry, but that night I poured out my heart to God. I went on the "Ladies of Courage" Yahoo discussion group and asked for prayers; I believe those prayers and my own were answered by God. That night led to a revelation—that I'd been scared of my mother ever since day one.

My mom was not a monster. She did not abuse us in any way. Although we did not grow up with much hugging or comforting physical contact, I know and have always known that my mom loved me. But where my dad is the happy easy-going fellow, my mom was the disciplinarian. She laid down the rules and enforced them. And by enforcing, I mean by a good spanking when we deserved it; never slapping or punching, and never punishing us when we did not deserve it. My mother was fair and did love me—so why was I *scared* of her? Then God showed me. I was a very shy, quiet, sensitive, bury the emotions, "don't stir the waters" kind of child. Mix my personality with my mother's, and you get "scared." My extreme sensitivity took my normal

“fear” of a parental figure to the next level. If I was scared of the person who was supposed to be the role model for my gender, why would I want to imitate her and learn from her about being a woman? My dad was a far better person to imitate. And from that point on I became, I think, my dad's shadow. I wanted to be like him in every way possible.

But God wasn't done with me yet. One more hammer to get me to my knees.

PART SIX: LET GO, LET GOD

A few days later after my trip to my dad's house, the thoughts and emotions were still coursing through me—the “Courage hill,” the valley of tears, and finally the uphill climb to understand why I was experiencing SSA and where I was called to go next.

When I was explaining all that had happened to me to my best friend one night, she pointed out something: even though I was claiming a good prayer life and dependence on God in every aspect of my life, I wasn't really *living* that claim. She said I never waited for God to give me answers. She said I didn't pray as much as I needed to!

I was really angry when she told me that. Then things started zooming through my head—the times when I did not “let go, and let God” in my life, even though I thought I'd turned my life over to Him. Once again the tears started flowing. The bottom line: starting with the Courage conference, my “playing God” was coming to an end. If I just let Him guide me to what He wants for me in my life, if I get on my knees willingly and without Him knocking me to them, His plans will come to be known, whether it takes minutes or the rest of my life.

PART SEVEN: THE COURAGE TO GO ON

Initially I didn't notice something that was happening in those first few weeks after the Courage conference and the two “take-downs” from God. I'd had so many revelations in those weeks that I was preoccupied with the relief of knowing I was not alone with my struggles; knowing I had support from my sisters and brothers from Courage; the unconditional love from my dad and mom, and most importantly, learning how to keep on the path that God was showing me and giving Him the reign of my life, especially concerning my SSA.

I can't even pinpoint the day I noticed this, but here it is: **I have not had any SSA desires since that time!** The physical aspect of SSA I've always, always desired in my head since I was a child was gone! I am claiming a miracle and healing from God! And I wasn't even looking for it. I just wanted to cope with my SSA, to follow Church teaching and to be happy with myself. And once I *really* gave myself over to God, He said, “Okay, let's take this away so you can focus on the rest of your life.”

My imaginary life, one that I'd relied on for so many years, has disappeared. My most vulnerable time for fantasies was always just before falling asleep. I realized I was no longer drawn to spend time with imaginary SSA desires, not even with the “hero” aspect of them. Now all I think about before sleep is the day I had, or, if I'm having trouble getting asleep, I picture God and Jesus building that mansion for me in heaven. I'm thinking I might just put a hot tub and indoor pool in that mansion after this last bout with my life!

I started to feel a “calling,” if you will, that I was meant to do something for others regarding the SSA aspect of my life. But I questioned how. My experience with SSA was, I felt, in many ways different from that of others. When I most recently attended the Annual Courage Conference in 2013, I got part of the answer. The Q & A with the parents of those of us who struggle with SSA are what I consider the best sessions of the conference. I felt soooo much empathy for those loved ones who are in emotional, spiritual turmoil for their children! During the social one evening I sought out a parent who was at the Q & A session. She’d been so troubled that she touched me deeply. I wanted to tell her that I would be praying for her and her child. I wanted to let her know she had support, even though I could not offer any tangible advice or help, and the best kind of help were prayers anyhow. We spent the next hour gabbing away: laughter, tears, whys, and the whole nine yards!

There was part of my answer: I could listen, especially to and for the parents! God said: “There, listen to my child and support her with your prayers.” I did. And do.

PART EIGHT: FINAL WORDS

The time since last year’s conference has been not been idle with me and God. I had another close and personal encounter with God, but this time it was not the “knock me to my knees” kind: I was already on my knees at Mass. I was pouring out my love to God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit for all that they have done for me in my life, especially with SSA. Next thing I know, I’m crying my heart out—in gratitude!

I continue to be in discussion with God about possible relationships—with humans of the *male* persuasion if it can /will be possible for me. Not that I’m looking for it for now, and eventually only according to God’s plan. I’m scared, actually. I’m testing the waters by sharing my story with a select few people, and with you, whoever you are, who might be reading this testimony.

I’m still stubborn. I still try to wrestle control of my life from God. I have a hard time hearing His answers at times. My prayer life can occasionally be slack. I still get those “knock me to my knees” realizations. I still smoke. I still cuss. I am human, but I’m trying to live my life on this earth according to God’s plan.

I’d like to attend this year’s Courage Conference. Don’t know what God has in store for me this time, but I know it’ll be something great. God loves me so much that He has used the Courage ministry to heal, encourage and love me through the other Courage members who also struggle with SSA.

I used to want to be a boy. I thank Him for the Courage—in the ministry and in my life—to live with, and to move beyond, SSA.