

About “The Gay Lifestyle”
Two Gay Lifestyles

by Dan Hooper ■ January 2004

This is not supposed to be “about me” but maybe telling a brief story of my “lifestyle” is as good an example as any. I do not claim to be a saint, but I am far from a reckless heathen. Because I am gay, I guess my lifestyle is, by definition, a “gay lifestyle.”

I have a faithful partner, of 27 years. We’re in our fifties. We share a home together. The last six of these years has included Carl’s mom, the last survivor of 13 years of elder care and the deaths of our other three parents. Miss Elsie is in nearly 95, has Parkinson’s, is legally blind, and needs a lot of care and supervision. But she chose to live with us, over two other heterosexual grown children.

We also have a dog, birds and chickens. We live in the middle of Los Angeles, California. We tend to a fruit orchard, which is so big that a lot of the fruit just gets washed and goes to church with us to be given to others or to the poor.

Our alarms go off at 5:30 in the morning. We both have office jobs now. Carl used to be a school teacher. I served as a Lutheran pastor, until I was outed and shown the door of the parish I was serving. We work hard. We pay taxes like everybody else. We vote. We pay our bills. We drive safely. We pull weeds (lots of them), we compost, we recycle, we keep the place up, we fix things. We say grace before every meal.

And in case you are curious, neither one of us is or ever has been promiscuous. Neither of us was ever interested in molesting little children. Neither one of us was molested, seduced or otherwise encouraged or led into our “gay lifestyles.” Each of us, as adolescents and young men, had to search—diligently but secretly—to find out anything about what being gay meant, or even to find and meet one other “homosexual.” In the 1960s and early 70s there was no one to talk to, period. But each of us “just knew” what we were, years before we “did anything about it.”

We tried to find out what caused us to be the people we are. It turned out, we are the products of good homes, loving and stable parents (my parents, 59 years, his parents 62 years of marriage), and of good solid churches. No hostile or absent father, no close-binding over-protective “smother” figure. Neither of us was confused about our gender, or our masculinity, or our relationships with our siblings or parents.

Neither of us has forgotten our Heavenly Parent, either. And neither one of us is ethnically or “genetically” Lutheran (joking!). We’re Lutheran because we believe the Gospel. Although we were raised in Christian homes, we both know that being a Christian is a matter of choice, and that being gay is not a choice. We just are.

As a matter of fact, we also tried lots and lots of prayer, we tried repentance, we tried self-loathing, we tried avoidance, we tried dating and mating with the opposite sex.

We tried being abstinent, self-controlled, and lonely. (Thankfully, both of us stopped short of being bitter and disillusioned.) Nothing changed the fact that we are who we are. No matter how deeply, faithfully, persistently, self-sacrificially we tried not to be gay, we still were.

We go to church. We always go to church. As we have served, faithfully, over these 27 years, between the two of us we have served in every church office, volunteer capacity and liturgical role there is in a church.

We've sung in the choir, taught, preached, organized the sacristy, sat on committees, wrote reports, took minutes, refinished furniture, decorated for Christmas, brought surplus clothing for the poor (washed and pressed), made soups and brought homemade bread for soup suppers. We've visited the sick and dying, and driven homeless people to the hospital. We have given, donated, pledged and tithed, and brought fruit by the bagful. We have prayed, studied the Word, laughed, cried and stayed in the Church.

Well, there you have two gay "lifestyles." Nope, these "lifestyles" don't jibe with what the televangelists and "family-oriented" political action groups keep claiming about "people like us." But I'm telling the truth.

Are we the exceptions? I don't think so. I can't speak for every adolescent, drug abuser or circuit-party boy. But I think we're far more typical of sexual minority people across our land than is imagined. Yes, it's impossible to verify that. Since tens of thousands of us were raised in times when it meant the complete death of our careers and family relationships if anybody "found out," how could anybody expect to know the true numbers or percentages of those of us who are leading good, decent, "vanilla" lives?

Are we pretty typical? Well, keeping chickens in the middle of Los Angeles, California is rare for gay men. But we know many, many more people like us in the GLBT community—friends, neighbors, co-workers and fellow church-members. And the elder-care part of our family life? It, too, is more typical than you might think. We belong to a support group that meets twice a month on a university campus, which is made up entirely of gay men who are the primary care-givers for elderly parents. That's a gay "lifestyle"? Yes, that too is one of them.

So the bottom line is, forget all the stereotypes you've ever heard about the "gay lifestyle." And with the stereotypes, forget the prejudice. Listen to what GLBT people are telling about their real lives, and let their hearts speak to your heart. We are all children of God.



[Shortly after this article was written, in March 2004 Dan Hooper was re-called to pastoral ministry by Hollywood Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Los Angeles, where he continues to serve. Miss Elsie died in August 2005 at the age of 97; Pastor Dan presided at her burial service in Phoenix, Arizona.]