

THE COMING OUT MONOLOGUES WORKSHOP

Every story is unique. Some people come out to the parents multiple times. You can email Mom, tell her every day, introduce her to your boyfriend, and she still calls to tell you about her church friend who has this amazing daughter, wouldn't you like to meet her? Then we have the parents who start asking suspicious questions after glancing at your best female friend, Sal-not-Sally. And parents aren't the end-all in the coming out journey. You come out to your family, your friends, your coworkers, your teachers, your school, your pets -- and to yourself.

So how do you tell your story?

What's important IS NOT THAT YOU CAPTURE ALL OF YOUR NARRATIVE. You can't tell the entirety of your life, everything that has happened, or at least you can't do it affectively. You end up with this long, vague abstract story:

I discovered who I was in actuality when I was ten. A lesbian. I suffered through high school at the hands of my friends. I found a girlfriend and she helped me understand me for the person I am. It was many years before I could come out to other people. I started by telling my family, who reacted negatively.

Think for a moment -- how did that share her experience? How did this invite the audience to know who she is? What's memorable about it? We know her story, but do we know anything about her?

Why tell your story in the first place? Why is it important to be able to articulate your story to yourself -- and to other people?

The key to sharing what it means to be you is to *pick a specific moment* or moments. You can then give backstory if you want, but start at your core with one specific moment

Here are some samples of coming out narratives from TCOM:

Not Gay Enough By Jami R. Grosser Copyright © 2007 Jami R. Grosser
Liz and I, we decided to call it my first day at camp. It seemed a lot better than referring to it as the first time we had sex or the first time I had sex with a woman. That night, that night changed my life. So to simply say that it was our "first time" wouldn't have cut it. No, it seemed more appropriate to give it a code name. A name that she and I would both know signified something more, but somehow maintained the secret.

Memories By Janelle Crane Copyright © 2007 Janelle Crane
I'm five years old. Daddy and my brother and I are working outside in the sun. It's hot and everyone's sweating. I want to take my shirt off like my dad. My brother takes his off and mimics Daddy wiping his face. I want to take mine off but just can't. It feels wrong. Mommy never takes her shirt off in the sun. I guess I shouldn't either.
I'm six years old. I kiss my friend Robin on the lips. We like to say goodbye with hugs and kisses. I teach her how to braid her hair. Her famous football daddy is never around. Her older siblings are always in trouble. She steals my lunch and makes me cry. We aren't friends anymore.
I'm ten years old. Kate and I tickle and chase each other during lunch. The cool kids snicker and ask my brother why I'm so weird and why I'm touching her.

Inevitability By Travis Cook Copyright © 2007 Travis Cook
There's nothing dramatic about the story of when I came out to my mom. There was no screaming, no bawling, no swearing, no threats, no ultimatums, no Christian counselors and no exorcisms. None of that. After I told my mom I was gay, we sat on our townhome's balcony for three hours just talking. For nearly that entire warm July evening, my mom and I sat outside having an honest and revealing conversation about my life. Pretty much the ideal outcome, I guess.

Therapy Thursdays By Emma Mishel Copyright © 2008 by Emma Mishel

Therapist Lady who wears a sweater-vest and tiny glasses sits on a chair across from us with her legs crossed. She tilts her head sympathetically and slowly shifts her focus from my parents to me.

She breaks the silence with, "Well Emma, why don't you tell us what it is that you like about girls?"

Wow. In my head I debate whether I should explain the luscious beauty of tits and ass, but I just sit there and stare at my spot on the floor. My mother wipes a tear and my father can't stop twitching his foot.

A week earlier I had a conversation with my mom, a blond heavy-accented Swedish woman, that went something like: "I think I'm a lesbian," to her nervously laughing and shaking her head like I was six years old and had just asked to paint the walls with my fingers. Not only did she not believe me, but the word "lesbian" to her sounds too much like the Swedish word "leskigt," which means scary and weird. She started cooking dinner and insisted that I didn't use that word again.

THE WORKSHOP

You may use the back of this as scratch paper.

- 1) List the people you've come out to -- including yourself.
- 2) Where? When? How many times?
- 3) How did they react? What did they say? What did they do?

(Examples: my mother cried and called me a faggot and said, "You'll get AIDS." My father put his hand on my shoulder and hugged me....

Example to avoid: Abstractions like "happily" or "violently.")

- 4) Are any of these interesting stories? Which stories do you feel that you have to tell?

THE NEXT STEP

Freewriting

For fifteen minutes, write exactly what's on your mind. Don't stop. Write in one run-on sentence.

Focus on the five senses

What you heard?

Where were you?

What did you feel? What did you say?

What happened?

WHAT NEXT?

Now you have your story in a nutshell. The next step is to rewrite, revise, and edit your work. Look for moments where things are left unexplained. Ask yourself, is every word, sentence, and moment necessary?

After this, you will have something that you can give to friends, submit to TCOM, or even just something that will help you when you're on a date and it's time to have that talk.

Workshop and worksheet designed by Brian Oglesby, UC Riverside, 2009.