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1000 Words

The Second Coming (Out)

by

Matthew Feeney

My first week in prison, my name got called over the P.A. for a visit and I was stunned when the entire cell block started chanting “HO-MO! HO-MO! HO-MO!” It was just like those classic prison movies right before a riot breaks out: loud, scary and intimidating as hell. Shaken, I went to my visit and shared the experience with my parents. I told them I didn’t know how I had been outed as a gay man to the entire cell block, but I remember naively stating my profound relief that “at least they don’t know I’m a sex offender.” Two hours later I returned to my cell block to learn everyone had actually been chanting “CHO-MO” – prison slang for a child molester. Thus began my six-year prison sentence for criminal sexual conduct with a seventeen-year-old male and his younger teenage brother.

Remarkably, I survived and served my entire prison sentence, the maximum allowed by law. I am now serving a new “indeterminate” (*de facto* life) sentence in a state mental asylum under Minnesota’s draconic civil commitment laws for the exact same crimes for which I served my prison time.

I am attracted to males and have been all my life. Back when I was growing up, this wasn’t just socially unacceptable, homosexuality was actually illegal and a diagnosable mental illness. The severe homophobia of the Catholic Church taught me my sexual attraction towards my male classmates meant I was “intrinsicly flawed.” I was encouraged to “love the sinner

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but hate the sin.” It was bad enough to hear masturbation was morally wrong, but as a teenager with an active imagination, I was petrified to learn even *thinking* sexual thoughts was as sinful as committing the act itself. I was screwed. So I buried my secret attractions deep, and fought like hell to hide and deny my homosexuality. I tried dating females in college and even explored becoming a priest as a valid, if not noble, explanation as to why I was still single and a virgin.

The American Psychiatric Association eventually dropped homosexuality as a mental disorder, but I never got the memo. I struggled with loving myself and never really got over the shame of my homosexuality. I was a damaged man with low self-esteem, embarrassed by my lack of sexual experience, and I tried to find acceptance with younger males.

I admit I screwed up. I broke the law. I pled guilty without any plea agreement and I served the maximum sentence allowable under state law. While incarcerated, I underwent three years of intensive sex offender therapy under the infamous Minnesota Sex Offender Program (MSOP). Within this program homophobia ran rampant, as evidenced by the fact gay men were given polygraphs asking about sexually acting out while straight offenders were asked about selling Ramen noodles. I had ample opportunities to have consensual sexual activity with attractive inmates, some who humorously self-identified as “gay for the stay, but straight at the gate,” but I chose not to. Despite being unable to act upon it, my circle of physical attraction has been enlarged while in prison. Knowing the possibility of civil commitment was looming over my head, I knew that any sexual activity while in prison would

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be used against me as evidence during my trial; not of me being cured, but rather of me being unable to control my deviant sexual desires even when under intense supervision.

As my six-year prison sentence was nearing completion, I was informed that the State of Minnesota was pursuing me for civil commitment. So instead of releasing me, they scheduled me for another trial, this time in civil court. They used the same facts and criminal history that precipitated my original prison sentence to claim I now had a mental disorder and needed to be locked up for the rest of my life in a secure mental hospital. Several of the homophobic actuarial tools used to assess potential targets for civil commitment raise your risk score if you provide an affirmative answer to "has at least one male victim." As a gay man, my crimes involved post-adolescent minor males and obviously any sexual activity with age-appropriate adults was not a crime, so there's no record of such legal activity. My only current mental diagnosis is that I am attracted to post-pubescent males.

Of course the MSOP civil commitment "treatment" program is a joke, a façade to provide the required legality to an otherwise unconstitutional civil commitment program. Like the Catholic Church, MSOP prefers to promote total abstinence and the program specifically prohibits any healthy sexual activity of any kind between clients, some who have been civilly committed for 28 years. Since I've been locked up, same-sex marriage has become legal in Minnesota. While MSOP policy has to now officially allow two clients to get legally married, the married couple is still subject to the same "no touch" restrictions and are moved to separate living units and not allowed any physical contact or display of affection. Married or not, anyone caught violating these policies is locked up in segregation, written up with multiple BERs

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("Behavioral Expectation Reports") and punished with room restrictions, loss of privileges and having to do additional "treatment assignments" connecting their current "acting out" to their original offending behavior.

It's ominously comfortable for this recovering Catholic to once again be living in such a homophobic environment where I'm being constantly watched and reminded how any & all sexual activity is bad and needs to be kept as a dirty little secret because we'll get punished if we get caught. No wonder no one ever completes this "treatment" program when healthy same-sex sexuality is punished and used against us in court as further evidence of our deviancy and need for further confinement. This program makes the old fashioned "ex-gay conversion therapy" seem like summer camp.

So here I am, an openly gay man, spending the rest of my life in a mental hospital which is pretending to provide "treatment" for a homosexual who already served an entire prison sentence for having sexual relations with a minor, while prohibiting him from engaging in any age-appropriate same-sex relationships... at the cost of \$398 a day.

For further information on civil commitment, please visit the *endMSOP* Facebook group or www.cure-sort.org or www.ajustfuture.org.