

Chapter 3

Drew

Drew did not admit—even to himself—that he might be gay until he was thirty-six. He gradually came to realize it over a period of several years. He married Susan in 1989, and they had two children. Drew grew up with a physically abusive mother, and he married a girl just like mom. Susan and Drew separated after eleven years of marriage because of her physical and mental abuse. While they were still married, Drew started having sex with men. After leaving his wife, he had a six-year relationship with Karl. Drew works for a financial company and lives with his children. He wants to be in a long-term, committed relationship.



—Drew’s Story—

It’s not like I realized at some point that I’m gay. For me, this was a gradual process, like an awakening. It was a process of coming to terms with who I am in my own fashion. I didn’t admit—even to myself—that I was gay until I was thirty-six.

There seem to be some people who are sure of their sexuality from a very young age. I was at an LGBT fundraising dinner recently, and the man across the table told me that his nine-year-old nephew just came out. How in the world can a nine year old understand himself well enough to declare he’s gay? How? Sometimes I still don’t know if I’m gay. At the age of nine, I can remember just being happy that I was nine. I know that our culture is more sexualized now. With TV and the Internet, kids are more aware of sex than I was and probably know more than I did.

People ask me if my being gay was what made me divorce my wife. It wasn’t. The fact of the matter is it might have been a component, but it wasn’t anywhere near a hundred percent of why I left Susan. I really wanted to have a good life with her, but unfortunately I didn’t pick the right wife—or maybe she didn’t pick the right husband. I don’t know. All I know is that I divorced her because I couldn’t live with her. Period.

—Marriage—

My marriage was hell. Susan was physically abusive. I want to be clear that, in talking about my relationship with her, I don’t want to take Susan down. It’s not my intention to do that or to punish her. But the truth was that she was abusive in all kinds of ways, and living with her was hell.

I realize that I played a significant part in all that drama. When I reflect back on the women in my life—Susan, my mother, my paternal-grandmother, the few girlfriends I’ve dated—they all had a mean streak. I seemed to be attracted to mean women—a lot like a moth drawn to a flame. If they didn’t get what they wanted, they would go ballistic. Over time, I learned what to avoid so as not to piss them off. I learned to live my life so as not to get hit or screamed at or made wrong. It’s a terrible way to live. I could never totally be myself and live the life I dreamed I would live.

Susan at no point ever apologized for what she did. She’s never apologized for damaging our home, or leaving scratches and scars on my

body, or breaking my toe that still aches every time it rains. It was as though violence was simply part of life for her, and she had no question that it was okay to live the life we were living. Never did she bring up that she thought the violence was wrong, or out of the ordinary, and maybe we should do something about it. Not once. I guess in her own way, she believed that I deserved to be punished for whatever she decided was a punishable offense.

Susan and I did just one couple's therapy session together, and she made lunch meat out of me in it. She told the therapist what she always told me—that everything was my fault, my problem, and my issue. We did only that one session because I saw that couple's therapy just wasn't going to work. Her attitude there was typical of her attitude about almost everything—it was her way or the highway.

There was no compromising with Susan. There was no discussion of what to do. She probably would say the same thing about me. When you get two stubborn people together, nothing ever changes. But I was willing at that point to get into what we needed to talk about. We simply weren't able to do it.

Even when I cheated on her in the end, I think it was partly spite and partly that I freaking needed some affection. Now I know that she's just not capable of nurturing and being affectionate. She's not even genuinely affectionate with our kids. It's just not her.

Susan and I didn't have the greatest sex life, but it wasn't because I didn't want to have sex with her. Some men I know who are gay just stopped having sex with their wives. That was never a problem for me. Sex was actually more of a problem for Susan. After we had children, her sex life just kind of died. This was long before she knew—and even before I knew—that I'm gay.

If I had grown up in a family that was not physically violent, I probably wouldn't have married Susan. I probably would have recognized the violence in her and that she was not who I wanted to spend my life with. But I didn't.

As far as divorce goes, I don't advocate it. I believe that divorce is an option if there are no other options. I mean I would have tried to work it out with her, but there was no working anything out with Susan. I wasn't in a situation where I could work it out. There were too many things out of my control, or out of my ability to change and make better.

Sometimes I wonder—if I'd married a woman who was capable of

love and affection, would I still be married to her? Would my life be totally different? Would I have been able to manage what I needed to in myself and remain in the marriage? I don't know. But Susan wasn't like that. I wish I'd known that when I married her, but I didn't.

If I had married another woman and we'd had a good relationship, would I now be gay? I don't know, but I think I would have had to. I probably would have come to a better understanding of who I am, but a lot of the guys I meet are in what I would call "good marriages," and they still end up wanting to be with men instead.

So one way or another, I think I would have come out. But I couldn't talk to Susan in an adult way about it because she went from zero to off-the-charts drama in less than two seconds. There was no sitting down and having a conversation with her about anything. If I said anything she didn't want to hear or deal with, she'd go into a tailspin. So I became conditioned to not talking with her about things.

Knowing what I know now, maybe I could have handled myself differently, but that wasn't the case when Susan and I were together.

—Coming Out—

I started to change later in our marriage. Susan's abuse had reached a level that I knew, whether I was gay or straight, the marriage was over. I was done hiding scratch marks from her nails. I just hadn't figured out yet how to leave.

Around 1997, I started to use the Internet, which was still a relatively new tool. I had noticed that I'd started feeling attracted to men. I would stay in my office late at night doing research on gay married men to help me understand what was happening and what I should do. Mostly I was trying to figure out if there was something wrong with me.

I discovered websites where I could chat with other gay and bisexual men. There were so many gay married men out there. I found out that I was anything but alone.

At that time, the websites were not regionalized like they are today. I might meet someone to chat with who lived in North Carolina or California, and I spent hours doing that. The more I chatted, the more empowered I became.

I don't believe I was "living a lie," as some people put it. I was finally

coming into my own. I was maturing and realizing who I am, and beginning to accept that I might be a gay man—not straight or even bisexual. I had signed up for a few websites and over a period of six months or so, I developed on-line friendships with several men. We discussed some pretty deep personal issues concerning our wives, our sexuality, our kids, and if we should come out.

In the entire time I'd known Susan, I'd never cheated on her. The thought had never even crossed my mind. And even though I was talking to these men, the distance kept us from meeting, and that was a good thing. Our conversations were enlightening for me and left me with plenty of time to think.

Around this time, I got into therapy at the suggestion of a doctor who asked me about some scratches on my neck. The doctor was mortified when I told her that Susan had scratched me in a rage. Her reaction made me realize I had to do something to change the direction my life was going. I saw a therapist by the name of Arthur for a short time. He was a Hasidic Jew who dressed in black and had long curls that dangled in front of his ears. He played with them compulsively.

Arthur and I never talked about my being gay. I was afraid to talk about that with him. I think I was afraid that if I spoke about being gay with anyone other than my on-line friends, it would make it real. I'd be letting the cat out of the bag and, once it was out, I might not be able to get it back in.

One day, as I was chatting on-line, I met Tom. Meeting Tom changed everything. He had just moved to Pittsburgh with his wife. It took me the longest time to get up the nerve to meet him in person. I really didn't want to face my fears, and I didn't want anything to happen.

We finally started meeting for lunch. We'd grab a pizza and sit outside his apartment and talk. I finally had a best friend who I could talk to about anything. We'd spend hours talking. Here I was, talking to someone who was in the exact same boat as I was, except that Tom didn't have children.

Soon he and I started getting together every Wednesday night to work out and play racquetball. Afterwards we'd go for a beer. Susan hated that I went out on Wednesday nights, but I declared it my time. One night after we had a beer, Tom and I found a secluded place and made out in his car. It felt so good to kiss another man. We continued to see each other for the next few months.

The next significant event for me on my path from straight to gay

happened on a business trip to Washington, D.C. I was doing some lobbying work there for the national organization my company belongs to. I drove down a day early and looked around the gay district in Dupont Circle. I spent the next day on Capitol Hill and had dinner with a few people at a Thai restaurant right near where I'd been the night before. When dinner was over, I took off to get a cab back to my hotel.

When I got to the corner and turned to cross the street, a very handsome man was standing in front of me, and he said hello. He looked like Clark Kent—clean-cut and well dressed. He was a little taller than me, which made him intimidating, given that he wasn't more than a few inches from my face.

He smiled and said, "I was watching you." That flustered me even more. *When had there been time for him to watch me?* I'd just walked down the street. I was thinking, *Oh, my God, who is this guy?* I turned around and walked back up the street. Then I stopped and thought, *Wait a minute. Maybe there was something there.* I turned around. He was still staring at me. I was startled and abruptly turned to keep walking away from him. Then I stopped and looked back again. He was still there looking at me. That's when I walked back over to him. We talked, and after a while went back to my hotel room.

His name was David, and he was in D.C. on business. I had never had that kind of experience. David had seen me and followed me. He'd put himself in front of me when I went to cross the street. At the time, I wasn't aware of any of that, because I wasn't paying attention.

David and I began a sexual relationship that didn't last long, but meeting him was the perfect thing to happen at that point in my life. It put me on a path that eventually led me out of my marriage and into my life as a gay man. Being with him helped me see the degree to which my marriage wasn't working and realize that I needed to free up my life and take care of myself.

Susan found out that I'm gay when she went into my computer one afternoon and saw that I was visiting gay websites. She also discovered from my emails that I had been hanging out with Tom. She called me early that afternoon at work. When she told me what she'd found, I was euphoric at first, because I was finally out of the closet. But then I realized that I had to go home. That night, Susan beat the crap out of me. I was so battered I had to miss work for the next several days.

That was the last time that Susan—or anyone else—ever hit me.

—Gay Adolescence—

Looking back, I know I made the right choice in coming out, although it was difficult for me at the time. When I left Susan and started seeing David, he lived in Philadelphia. That was a good six-hour drive from Pittsburgh, and it was difficult for us to meet, particularly because I had two young children. It was the first time in my life that I got involved with someone outside my neighborhood. It was also difficult because at first I tried to make a committed relationship out of something that could never be a committed relationship.

A few months after David and I started seeing each other, he went on a cruise and had sex with someone. He came to see me afterward, and I couldn't deal with what he had done. I wasn't used to being treated that way. David had cheated on me. I'd only been in monogamous relationships up to that point.

Of course, I was blind to the fact that, by the end of our marriage, I was having sex with partners other than Susan. Hell, after I left Susan, I wasn't even being monogamous with David—even while I was upset with him for sleeping around. I was clearly having problems reconciling the reality of my new life with the values I'd always had about relationships, monogamy, and what I expected from my partner.

I wanted a committed relationship. I didn't want to sleep around, even though that was what I was doing. I obviously didn't know what I wanted.

I was seeing a therapist named Julie at that time. After I spoke with her, I was able to gain some perspective about what was happening to me. She told me that I was going through gay adolescence.

I had never heard the term before, but it described perfectly the point I was at in my life. On the one hand, I was a thirty-some-year-old man who wanted an adult relationship. On the other hand, I wasn't much different than a fifteen-year-old kid with hormones raging and a compulsive desire to make use of my new sexual identity. I was just coming out, and I had no clue how to act like an adult.

Wisely, Julie advised me that at that time of my life, I had no business being in a long-term exclusive relationship with anyone. It wouldn't be fair to my partner and wouldn't be fair to me. Soon after that, David and I ended our relationship, although we remain great friends.

—Drew’s Life Now—

When I came out, I was afraid that coming out might ruin my life, but the opposite turned out to be true. Coming out made my life better because I could be myself. I didn’t have to hide from myself any more.

Coming out changed my life in ways I couldn’t have imagined. I stopped living as a victim. After Susan found out that I’m gay, things got even worse between us, and I knew I couldn’t live with her any longer. I left Susan and went to court and won shared custody of my children. My son and daughter were only three and five at the time. They’re now in their late teens and they both choose to live with me full time. I have a great relationship with my children. They mean the world to me.

Coming out to my family was easy. My parents were blue-collar people who lived in the suburbs. My father worked for a large manufacturing company, and my mother was a housewife. They struggled and scraped by all their lives. I was actually kind of surprised that there really never was an issue with my coming out to them. One day I was talking with my mother about something, and she asked me if I was gay. I said, “Ma, I like boys.” That was it. That was pretty much all that happened. No one in my family had ever come out as gay, so there was really no precedent. I set the precedent.

I think that coming out in my mid-thirties may have had something to do with how easy it was for me. Who the hell was gonna tell me what to do at that point in my life? Who was gonna say that I shouldn’t do this or I should do that? I think my parents saw that this was what I’d done, and they had to accept it.

I think if you’re younger when you come out—say, sixteen or eighteen—your family may still try to influence your decisions. They may try to save you from yourself. My family knew that no matter what they said, I would do whatever I wanted.

About six months after I left Susan, I started dating Karl. I asked my therapist Julie how I should introduce him to my family. Her advice was to just show up with him. That’s what I did. That’s how I introduced Karl to my family—to my kids, my parents, and my other relatives. And it worked. Over time, my family came to really like him. I didn’t make a big deal about having a boyfriend, and neither did anyone else.

In the years since I came out, I’ve become even more open about who I am. The more honest you are with people, the nicer they are to you.

People become disarmed when I share myself openly with them. One time, Susan told a group of parents whose kids played sports with my son that I'm gay. I know she did that to diminish me in their eyes, and I thought they might shun me after that. But they didn't. Not only did they not shun me, but it was my experience that they tried to support me. When you're genuine and honest and authentic with people, they reach out to you. I think we're all attracted to authenticity.

My relationship with Susan is very different now. I'm not trying to change her, but I don't allow her to abuse me anymore. I recently drove somewhere with her, and she started complaining almost as soon as she got in my car. I very calmly said, "I don't want to hear you complain about anything. You need to stop or get out." It was the most peaceful drive we'd had in years, although it didn't last. When I had to drive her somewhere again last week, she was as unpleasant as ever. I now do as little with Susan as I can.

Karl and I were together for six years. I really tried to make it work with him, but we had different agendas and different needs. We even went to couple's therapy for about six months because I wasn't willing to give up on it. But we couldn't make it work.

My friends who are in relationships ... their relationships seem to be working pretty well. They have a good yin and yang. But for me and, I think, for many gay men, we're still looking.

Leaving my marriage was the right thing for me to do, although it was really hard at the time. I've never regretted it. In fact, I applaud it every day.

In the fourteen years since Susan and I parted, I've grown to love my life. I had no way of knowing then how happy I could be.

—Advice—

What Should You Do?

Life is too short to not be happy. Once you accept that you're gay, move forward with integrity and be at peace with yourself, however you decide to do that.

Children

You have to be honest with your kids. Hiding the fact that you're gay makes it harder on everyone. Honesty leads to a better relationship with your children.

Get Support

Most people don't have much consciousness about themselves and their lives, and it makes such a difference when you do. I'm not sure how to suggest that you do that, other than to say that it made a big difference for me to go to a therapist. Nobody wants to go to a therapist ... but, man, do they call you out on your shit.

Julie, the therapist I saw after I left Susan, would make a little comment about something I was talking about, and it would leave me questioning myself. *You mean that's not what I should be doing?* She usually wouldn't tell me what I should or shouldn't do. She would just allow me to figure it out for myself as we kept talking. Other times she would have suggestions for me that made perfect sense for me but that I never would have thought of on my own.

Julie put things in perspective for me. There are many things that are not good in the gay world, and there are many good things too. That's true in the straight world. It's true in life. But when you're in the gay world, you don't think that anything else exists, because the two worlds don't really come together.

I would say to Julie that it's just that way in the gay world, and she would say, "Oh, no, it's that way in both worlds, but this is the world you're in right now." She always put things into perspective for me. She was there for me as I was going through my divorce and my custody battle with Susan. I would email Julie, and she'd respond to me—any time. She coached me through it all.

I would not be in as good shape as I am today if I hadn't worked with Julie. She really set the stage for my recovery. Julie was a lesbian who had been married to a man, had a daughter, and came out. What better situation could I have been in than to have a therapist who had already been through what I was going through?