

## Lovers

"I think I like boys," I told him one night at the drive-in movie where Mother had taken Judy and us. Jerry and I had little interest in the movie, apparently, and had wandered to the very back of the lot. We were standing (as it seems now we often were) beside a chain-link fence, looking out into the nearby neighborhood.

"There's a word for it," he replied: "*Homosexual*—you know, like in homogenized milk, *homo* means 'same'."

A couple of years earlier I had experienced my first ejaculation while riding my bike. I used to coast down hills using my muscles to balance myself on the handlebars, and one day the strain resulted in that surprising, intensely pleasurable sensation. Over the next few months I kept a tally on the garage wall above where I leaned my bike, marking each time that that wonderful feeling had occurred—rather proud of myself, I suppose, that I had managed to achieve such a 'breakthrough', or receive such a gift.

I also learned that I could cause the same sensation by wearing two pair of jeans, thus constricting the genitals. I'd walk down to the shopping center and soon have an orgasm as I passed along in front of the stores. This became my preferred technique, probably because the challenge not to reveal anything to the people on the sidewalk about the pleasure I was experiencing and added an element of titillation to the event. I must have spent a lot of time spot-washing my clothes; I was always throwing shorts or jeans with a wet place on them into the dirty clothes hamper in the bathroom. Did Mother or Granny ever wonder about that?

In winter, though, I switched to a new procedure. I'd light the gas fire, strip, and lie on my stomach on the cool tile floor, gently moving my legs and hips to achieve the by-now familiar sensation. The five of us shared one bathroom, and although I'd abandoned my tallying when the weather got cooler, I'm sure I hadn't tried to cut back on the number of times I experienced the good feeling. I learned to pretend to be bathing; that gave me the time I needed, though I had the bother of filling the tub.

Jerry was way ahead of me, of course. His giving me a term for my confessed predilection no doubt reassured me that there were others like me, but it also established him as a sexual mentor. He showed me how to masturbate with soap and water, the two of us

standing naked in front of the big mirror in his father's bathroom. The pleasure I experienced was, naturally, even more intense than what I was used to, and that was in part because I was sharing it with another boy.

Our friendship had entered a new phase. We masturbated together as often as we could, and we soon began masturbating one another. We moved to the bed one day and discovered intercrural intercourse and frottage. Fellatio followed. We experimented with positions, and with places, often lying on the carpet in the living room (off-limits to the dogs) between the sofa and the coffee table. I remember how amusing it was to me to look over at the delicate china figurines representing English gentry on the lower shelf of the coffee table while we were in flagrante. We also lay under the grand piano, and that became a regular trysting place for us in later years, both when the piano was moved to the Green Shack and when we were visiting Bob in Houston and took advantage of the space under his 7-foot Steinway.

It was always a worry to us that Mr. Hunt would come in unexpectedly, and we did have a couple of close calls (even on Swiss Avenue, many years later). As a salesman, he might be calling on stores in the neighborhood, and he would drop by the house for a bite to eat or to use the phone or the bathroom. We knew better than to lock the front door—that would be suspicious.

Establishing what others knew—or even what oneself knew—at any given time is always difficult where sensitive matters are concerned. I think now that the Hunts did suspect early on that Jerry and I were "messing around", but they chose not to think too much about it—until they later confronted Jerry with his homosexuality, at a time when I was out of the picture. I never felt unwelcome, however; neither Jerry's parents nor mine ever exerted the least pressure on us to be together less, or to spend more time with others, as best I can remember.

One of my earliest fascinations with Jerry concerned the almost adult-like relationship he had with his parents. They involved him in making decisions and gave him responsibilities to a degree that was much beyond what I was used to. When he was headstrong, they seemed to loosen the reins. I realized a few years ago that they knew all along they were rearing an exceptional child, perhaps a genius. That was, indeed, what they had always heard from their son's teachers. Perhaps Jerry's awareness of the special regard, apart from love, in which his parents held him strengthened

his sense of identity. He was very comfortable as an independent thinker even as a young boy, and that had a mixed effect on me. We enjoyed sex together, keeping our secret of course, but never questioning the implications of that facet of our friendship for ourselves and for our families. It goes without saying that, in the late '50s and early '60s, we had no notion of a political identity as homosexuals, of "gay rights".

Of this much I am sure: what Jerry knew was that he had a friend with whom he could be completely himself, someone with whom he could 'play' with increasingly higher stakes. What I knew is more problematic. Even as a very little boy, I realized that other boys, and men, mattered to me in a way that was unusual and suspect. All the subtle and overt promptings I felt to care especially for girls meant nothing to me—except, later, when they became goads to what I soon realized would be inevitable failure. Jerry and I were almost too successful in insulating ourselves from the censure that would have forced us to examine our natures and our behavior, asking the questions that would have led to self-affirmation or, perhaps, to a cry for help. In my case, that cry, and that affirmation, were to come almost twenty years down the road, a delayed climacteric that is referred to as 'coming out' today.

But Jerry never really needed that self-examination; he never really needed to 'come out'. He was cast as an

eccentric early on, and it was a role he enjoyed and cultivated throughout his life. His musical talent, his genius—they dazzled people and kept him on a protective dais from which he could look down at those who dared not look up to examine his manner or his motives too closely. In a sense he was able—freer—to love me more deeply than I was him. I was even a little afraid of him at times, afraid of his self-assurance and of the demands he made on me.

Whatever it was that got shoved aside to be resolved later, in my case, was no obstacle to our enjoying ourselves together. I began spending the night with him more and more often. His parents respected his room as his private domain. We'd shut the door, and when we heard his parents go to their bedrooms, I'd jump in bed with him, abandoning for a while the single bed that was there for a couch during the day or a guest at night. We were always careful to make our clean-up trips to the bathroom separately, and at some time apart.

Afterwards, I did go to my own bed. That, as I look back on it now, tells the tale. We were kids, after all, effortlessly capable of arousal and orgasm, not so capable of romantic love. It's probably just as well that that was so; had it not been, we'd have been caught for sure.