

# My Dichotomous Life

*Gay and Mormon*

A Memoir from 1984 - 2015

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## **Introduction**

As a society, we owe our proudest achievements to the endless variety of human perspectives and experiences. Yet, few of us are brought up to trust and value our uniqueness. Many of us feel pressured to conceal our true identity for fear of rejection, ridicule, or worse. It is even more unfortunate that our fears are often well-founded.

Why do we let this happen? One reason is that it is simply too difficult for us to understand one another. Without common ground from which to resolve our differences, conversations turn into mutual accusations. Accusations turn into fear. Fear turns into hatred. And here we are, often left with the choice to either conform (while abandoning our identities) or accept ourselves (while often being shunned). My hope is that my written experiences will help bring about compassion, love, and acceptance toward those LGBTQs who are silently suffering in conformity and who are likely present in each of our lives.

This is the story of how I denied and suppressed my sexuality for eighteen years—from age nine until twenty-seven. It was a kind of emotional agony that I wish upon no one. I especially do not wish it upon an innocent child who knows nothing of the prejudice against homosexuality. When children reach the age of discovery, their sexual identity must be cherished and protected by those who nurtured them from the womb. All children are pure at heart. It is only out of ignorance that we deny them the right to be who they truly are.

As I write this autobiography, I do not write out of hate. I write out of love for all those who find sexual identity a puzzling subject-matter. While growing up as a gay Mormon, I can attest to a similar confusing inner-conflict which I struggled with for many years. Through this struggle to deny my sexuality, I've learned something that a major portion of America does not understand: sexuality is not chosen or forced. It is something given at birth but manifests at various ages. My sexuality will forever be a part of who I am. It has never changed and it never will. Yet the Mormon Church has attempted to "cure" me of my homosexuality. Sadly, such attitudes still persist even today in families, religions, governments, and institutions throughout the world. It is my hope that by sharing my story, I can bring love and understanding to this highly controversial topic. I deeply feel that we must stand united in our differences as human beings. Our country was founded on the promise of civil liberties—a promise toward which we are still striving to achieve. I'm a very optimistic person so I've always believed that, in time, this promise will triumph over prejudice and hate.

## **I Just Felt "Different"**

My upbringing was filled with a mix of conflicting emotions. Life quickly became very confusing and complex for a young boy who understood nothing about sexuality. Early on, I discovered that I wasn't like other boys my age. I could not fully comprehend what set me apart from them. I just felt "different." As I grew older, it became evident that this difference was same-gender attraction. Because I was born into the Mormon religion, I saw myself and my future in terms prescribed by my Church. The last thing I wanted was to depart from its teachings. Nor did I want to be judged, ridiculed, hated, or exiled by my congregation. I soon found myself concealing my sexuality from family, friends,

and peers. For years to come, life was a long and emotionally confusing rollercoaster. I eventually came to realize that those religious beliefs I held so sacred attempted to deprive me of a very sacred part of who I am—my sexual identity.

## **My Innocence**

I can still vividly remember a story that affected me strongly on an emotional level. It was a story seared deep into my memory as if naturally becoming permanently bound to my identity. I sat at my grandparents' dinner table in their home in the beautiful Oregon countryside with my brothers and sisters. My grandmother told the inspiring story of a loving romance she and my grandfather shared. Because her parents forbade her to marry my grandfather, my grandparents flew away together to elope. I was fascinated by the power and courage of their love for each other. It has been my dream—ever since—to marry the love of my life and grow old together just as my grandparents did.

I grew up with three brothers and two sisters. Being the youngest and the smallest of four boys, I was teased mercilessly. Even so, I feel fortunate to have been surrounded by a large, loving family. Although this large family instilled in me many life-long qualities like sharing, patience, and family values, I still felt inadequate. I had no one to talk to about the confusing feelings I was experiencing as I matured. I was surrounded by people, but no one to confide in. Already being very timid, I was petrified to tell anyone about my inner-conflict.

I was quiet, shy, and constantly preoccupied with the deeper meanings of life as a child. Being highly perceptive and observant, much more so than any other children my age my mother would always mention, I could not connect with children very well. I just felt my life's questions could never be answered to my satisfaction and children were not much help. In fact, I preferred nature to the company of others. While the Church took over every facet of my existence, I enjoyed being alone to experience life by myself. The countryside was my escape from the Mormon world. It was the only place where I felt free to be myself, find peace in my thoughts, and meaning in my life. I was absolutely in love with the freedom I felt when I was alone in the countryside.

At age five, I decided to become extremely fit. I was determined to take care of my body so that I could live into my hundreds. My inspiration was the Biblical "Seth" who lived to be 912 years old! I learned in primary school at Church that God sent Seth to replace his slain brother Abel. Seth was the most righteous and pure of all Adam's children and, my name being Seth, I felt it was my duty to resemble him. I had my work cut out for me! At that age, I did not yet know the meaning of sin. I remember thinking I was as perfect as Jesus. I cared for the sick. I loved unconditionally. I only wished goodness upon everyone. To be like the Biblical Seth, I just needed to solve the age problem. So, I convinced my best friend Michael to go running with me every day around an enormous plot of land nestled within the deep forests of Jackson, Tennessee. It was our playground. It was a place we could freely explore to our little hearts' content. Unfortunately, those care-free days were short-lived.

## **“Socially Awkward”**

The summer after my sixth birthday, we moved to Southern California. The fresh crisp air of the countryside, the awe-inspiring starry skies, and the beautiful plush greenery of my lovely home became a thing of the past. I was surrounded by people everywhere. The homes were so close together that I could easily see into my neighbor's windows! Where was I to play and explore? And the smog... the smog was almost unbearable!

After we moved to California, my parents had me repeat the first grade because I seemed “socially awkward.” The truth was that I was an unusually thoughtful and compassionate child. Even though the teachers loved me, I was out of my element around children my own age. I just didn't care to be part of a culture that prided itself on taunts, competitiveness, and humiliation. And I was slowly learning that there was something unusual about me, strangely unusual. Uneasiness grew as time passed. I longed for my happy little life back in Tennessee where life was familiar, simple, and comfortable.

## **My Discovery**

My parents bought a home in Los Angeles County, California. I was nine years old and in the third grade at my new school when I discovered something about myself. It was a feeling that was utterly intriguing yet natural and deeply innate. I couldn't keep my eyes off of someone! His name was Adam. He was adorable and just so gorgeous! I had no words to describe him. During recess, I would search for him and just gaze at him from a distance. It made me feel so happy inside to see him every day. I almost couldn't stop thinking about him. I remember the girls talking about how cute he was and thinking, “Of course he is!” Soon, confusion set in. Why did none of the boys have these feelings? Was I normal? It was such an unbelievably strong and sincere feeling that, for a time, I didn't care.

This all changed when I was about ten years old. I found out at church that my attractions were considered an “abomination.” It would have to be something I would have to keep secret. I can remember anxiously looking up the word “homosexuality” after hearing it discussed in a church sermon. On an extremely personal level, “I” could somehow connect with this term. I hurried to my Bible's table of contents to find out more. I was scared when I came across Leviticus 20:13 from the Old Testament. It read, “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.” When I read this, my heart sank in despair. But, this close physical intimate love and connection to my same gender was so undeniably genuine and real. I couldn't deny this fundamental piece of who I was! At about this time, my self-hatred began. The feelings that were once a source of joy now caused severe depression and unimaginable pain. At that young age, I quickly found that I was growing up gay in a church that didn't accept me for my true self. I had to change my attractions to become worthy of my religion. That was the beginning of an agonizing struggle with a religion that wanted to change an important piece of my identity—my sexual identity.

## **My Self-Hatred**

The Mormon religion taught that homosexuality is like a sinful “disease.” I could overcome this pestilence with faith in God, prayer, and persistence. The church’s teachings gave me hope that I could be like everyone else. And, after years of struggle, I wholeheartedly embraced this belief. By the age of twelve, I had exerted all my efforts to deny my sexuality. I believed the pain of denying my sexuality was necessary to fully repent for my shameful same-sex attractions. Even the word homosexuality sent chills down my spine because “I” was one! But, I couldn’t be one of those! Why was I cursed with such a profound iniquity? I felt empty inside and unworthy of life itself. In my desperation, I redoubled my zeal for prayer and repentance in hopes of a full recovery from this “sin.”

## **The Boy Scouts of America**

At twelve years old, I was finally old enough to join the Boy Scouts and experience the outdoors once more! Although I was quite timid and gentle-hearted, I loved “hanging with the guys.” I found a sense of bonding and shared purpose in our adventures together. I now wanted to be tough and crude like the other boys, and to “fit in.” Deep down I knew this was impossible because I was too tender-hearted. And I could never tell anyone in the Boy Scouts about my same-sex attraction! I would be shamed, ridiculed, and exiled forever! Although the Boy Scouts taught me many important life-lessons like honesty, I could never reveal to them my inner-self. I could never be truly honest. I had to hide myself from even those I admired and held in the utmost regard. Everywhere I turned, I was only met with confusion which led to self-hatred. Even though I was very active within the Boy Scouts and even earned the highest rank, Eagle Scout, I felt truly alone amongst the masses.

## **A Perfect Mormon**

Spirituality was a large part of my childhood. Understanding my spiritual identity brought purpose to my life. I can remember there being nothing more important to me than increasing my spiritual testimony of the truth of the Mormon Church. I felt it was a way I could come to better understand my earthly existence. Not only did I go to church every Sunday, but my entire life practically revolved around the Mormon religion. It was my entire life. The Church taught me that all of my actions and thoughts were for the betterment of the religion. I was convinced that I must do whatever it took to be the “perfect Mormon.” This especially meant following the teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith Jr. and all his proceeding modern-day prophets. Specifically, this meant that I must give myself to the Church by bringing as many people as I could into its fold. I must become a “Mormon missionary.”

## **My “Mission” to Change**

The Prophet Joseph Smith’s teachings consumed my entire life by age sixteen. At that time, I hit rock bottom! I couldn’t stop sobbing for months at a time. I finally realized

I could no longer pretend to be heterosexual. My only option was to completely overcome this “sin,” just like the courageous prophets from the Book of Mormon fought to overcome their sins! I was to force myself to become heterosexual by serving as a missionary and showing God that I was willing to sacrifice two years of my life for Him. If that didn’t change me, nothing would. Depression and suicidal thoughts were slowly consuming my everyday life. I had been in utter confusion since I was nine years old! I wanted all of it to finally just disappear! This had to work. It was my only hope...

## **My Calling**

At age nineteen, I resolved to apply to serve as a Mormon missionary. Nine months later, I received my missionary “calling” during the winter of 1998 from the Mormon prophet Gordon B. Hinckley to serve in the João Pessoa, Brazil mission. According to our beliefs, it was the very Creator of this world who called upon me to go forth into João Pessoa. I felt deep in my soul that it was my destiny. I was to preach the living Word of God to those in dire need of salvation. I would be part of building the Kingdom of God on Earth and I would forget myself for the greater good of mankind. What a magnificent thought! In spite of it all, in the back of my mind, there was a reluctance that churned madly. God despised me for my sexual attractions, and I wanted to prove myself worthy of His love. Didn’t Christ die for me so I could accept his sacrifice and at least become a “perfect Mormon” for him?

## **The Missionary Promise**

Before leaving for Brazil to embark on my mission, I had to pass an interview with the Stake President. This holy leader oversaw about 3,000 parishioners. He was not only a great man of God, but an astute and successful businessman at that. The air of his office was thick with intimidation. I felt small and sinful in his presence. I thought his holy calling from God might give him the ability to discern my deep dark secret. The thought of being found out was unbearable, and I silently prayed that God would spare me this disgrace.

Many of the questions he asked during the interview concerned my sexual conduct. Only chaste young men and women could serve as missionaries. I had no problem in that area. I was too scared of my sexual feelings to ever act on them. I also had complete faith that my service would give God the compassion to relieve my suffering. Serving as a missionary had to be the answer to overcoming this “sin!”

Then, the final question came. The Stake President asked me to “raise my arm to the square” – making a gesture of an oath – and asked, “Can you promise me you will honorably complete the full two years of your missionary calling?” This question hit me like a ton of bricks! “Am I even worthy right now?” I asked myself inside. My mind began racing. Then I realized, God certainly would have told him, by this point, if I wasn’t worthy. So I just answered with a resounding “yes!” Like all the preceding questions, this one had only one right answer as well. If I was to be sent on my mission, I had to promise to stay the course. The Mormons use the term “dishonorable release” for missionaries who return home early for bad behavior. These words place shame and disappointment, not only upon the missionary, but upon the entire family for failure to

raise a good Mormon. In a split second, I was then sworn to uphold my promise of an honorable return. The Stake President then gave me an affirming hug. We knelt down together while he prayed that God might protect and guide me through my mission. Only later did I grasp the full meaning of that hug and that prayer. The Stake President must have sent off more than a hundred young missionaries. Unbeknownst to me, he knew full well what lay ahead. He then shook my hand and bid me farewell. A sense of relief came over me as I walked out of his office. I thanked God for keeping my secret safe and for allowing me to serve as His missionary.

## **The Missionary Training Center (MTC)**

My parents drove me to the Missionary Training Center where I arrived on April 25, 1999 in Provo, Utah. The MTC was the training ground for teaching the “Army of God” how to prepare the world for His second coming. My first name was removed, not to be used again under any circumstance. I received a name-tag with the title “Elder,” the same as the other male missionaries. For the next two years, I would be known as “Elder Ferreira,” a special rank reserved for God’s personal servants, because He had called upon someone as special as me to save a vast portion of Brazil from their sins. One conundrum existed. “How could a terrible sinner who is attracted to other males bring salvation to anyone?” This self-doubt would haunt me throughout my entire mission.

Nevertheless, as I stepped inside the MTC, I felt a sense of relief and excitement. I was on my own for the first time in my life. I would search my soul and find out what was making me have these sexual attractions. I could finally focus on how to resolve this problem. The MTC brought me a strong feeling of acceptance, love, and camaraderie. It was nothing but brotherly and sisterly love fed by the pride and joy in our unique cause. I soon formed close ties with all those in my missionary district headed for Brazil. We all missed our homes, but we were united in a greater cause. It brought humility to my soul knowing I was embarking on a quest on behalf of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I was called to bring the true gospel of love and righteousness to the world! I was comforted in this thought and believed I could overcome anything! What I didn’t know was that this new experience would only exacerbate my current struggles. I was now facing four more weeks in the Brazilian missionary training center, then twenty-two more months in the mission field.

## **Missionary Training Center, Brazil**

When I arrived in São Paulo, Brazil at the “Centro de Treinamento Missionário (CTM),” it all finally set in. I was in for the long haul. There was no turning back now! I felt apprehensive and often asked myself if I had made the right decision. Was this what I really wanted? I became restless as an intense nausea permeated my core. Everything in Brazil was so strange: the language, food, culture, weather... Worse of all, my sexual attractions were becoming even stronger! What was I doing here? Where was God and why had He abandoned me when all I wanted was to serve Him? Every night my mind would take me thousands of miles away to a place of comfort—my home. And every morning I awoke back in the MTC dorm room with a sense of intense fear and anxiety.

Soon after I arrived in São Paulo, I was called to be a District Leader by the MTC president. I was extremely nervous, especially since I was so confused about my sexual attractions. I just felt completely unworthy of this position. I was constantly having sexual thoughts which I attributed to “temptations from the devil.” When thinking back, I can remember being taught that the devil tempts who he finds to be his greatest enemy. I felt, because I was given these strong feelings, Satan must find me a huge threat! These impure thoughts would subside if I worked hard enough and kept busy. Satan would not get the best of me! So, I was glad that my days were filled with language lessons, discussions, scripture reading, and memorization. Nonetheless, I would often find myself daydreaming about an attractive missionary. What was wrong with me? I was working so hard to control my same-gender attraction, yet it seemed to get worse the more I resisted! I prayed daily that God would finally relieve my suffering.

## **The Silver Lining**

Fortunately, one person made my life at the MTC bearable. I was assigned to the most wonderful missionary companion. His comforting voice, calm demeanor, and thoughtful personality reassured me that I could find peace at this difficult crossroads. He was someone I could talk to for hours while we lay in our bunk-beds and reminisced about the lives we left behind. He was musically talented, incredibly smart, and caring. While I was not attracted to him physically, I felt connected to him on a different level—a stronger level. I hadn’t realized it until later in life, but this experience, and many similar ones in the course of my mission, offered me a profound connection to who I am inside. Discovering myself in like-minded companions helped me discover the qualities I would seek in my future life-partner. This was one of the unforeseen yet remarkable rewards of my mission. Being a missionary has also taught me to develop my spiritual self in ways I never thought possible. I learned to love each member of humanity. My work became a daily expression of this love. And, although I consistently felt a sense of inadequacy as a District Leader, I led my district the best I could.

I can vividly recall the last meeting I had with my district as their leader. In a private room, we knelt down to pray together for the last time. I would likely never see most of them again. I offered to say our parting prayer. I had no idea what to say, but when I opened my mouth in my broken Portuguese I felt my heart unravel. I prayed from the depth of my soul which produced the warmest and most comforting feeling. I spoke with such overwhelming and complete sincerity and love that when we opened our eyes, no one could hold back the tears. We were all literally sobbing. We became so immersed in each other’s lives that our love for one another was stronger than any I had ever experienced in my lifetime. It was a defining moment which I will cherish forever.

## **The Furthest Eastern City of the Americas**

After one month at the MTC in São Paulo, I was flown 1,700 miles north-east to the furthest eastern city of the Americas — João Pessoa in the state of Paraíba. Soon after we landed, my fellow missionaries and I, “the greenies,” met with the Mission President and his wife for dinner. It was the first home-cooked meal I had for over two months and it was delicious! Their home was ornately decorated with native Brazilian wood



furnishings and beautiful carpentry. “Maybe this isn’t going to be so bad after all,” I thought. I found out the next day how wrong I was.

The following day, the mission president called each of us into his office, one-by-one, to detail our assignments. When I walked in, he opened two large cabinet doors where hundreds of pictures were prominently displayed of each missionary from the mission. He then rolled out a giant map on an oval table and explained where I would be headed the following morning. He pointed to a tiny lonely city deep in the middle of the state Rio Grande Do Norte—a city called Caicó (located in a semi-arid region of the northeast). The mission president then, with a Polaroid camera, took [my picture](#) and placed it among my fellow missionaries. I was now officially part of the mission. I was excited, anxious, hesitant, and overwhelmed all at the same time. I left California thinking I was going to be living in the tropics, but when I arrived I was sent to a place similar to the high deserts of California. Except in Caicó, it’s blazing hot all year round! Not to be melodramatic; but, what I endured during the following 22 months, I can never forget.

### **“Seja bem-vindo” Elder Ferreira!**

That day, I was put on a bus “alone” headed straight for Caicó. During the ride, I remember thinking, “I’m in the middle of nowhere, hours from civilization in a foreign country where I barely know how to form a coherent sentence!” I mustered up the courage to ask the man seated next to me if the Caicó stop was coming up soon. With a look of confusion, he formed a squinted face and quickly nestled back into his seat and closed his eyes. Some people boarded the bus with live chickens and other animals. I was not in America anymore! So many things were running through my mind. “Did I miss my stop?!” “What should I do if I did?!” “I can’t even understand a thing these people are saying!” “They sound nothing like what I learned in the MTC!” “It’s all gibberish to me!” I was beginning to panic! After another two hours of anxiety attacks, the bus finally pulled into a station. As I stepped off the bus, two young men dressed in street clothes came up to me and said, “Seja bem-vindo [welcome] Elder Ferreira!” How relieved I was to hear those words! They introduced themselves as my roommates. My missionary companion would meet us later in the evening.

### **My Solitude**

My first missionary companion in the field was nothing but—how do I put it—a hard ass! There are no other words to explain him. I mean, he followed every rule to the perfect “T.” The next two months were literal hell. I fell into an even deeper depression. I remember one day sitting on a family’s porch while my companion taught the Mormon principles of the Church. I could not take it anymore and I broke down crying. He ended it early and asked me what was wrong. I couldn’t bear to tell “him” of all people. So, I just said I was homesick. A month passed and was gone. We were walking home down a long eerie stretch of cobblestone highway in 110-degree heat. I remember I was so exhausted and depressed that I thought I could easily step in front of a speeding car to end my life, just to stop the anguish. Just one step is all it would take to make it all end. No matter how strongly I wanted to just end the pain, I was somehow able to stop

myself. I suppose deep down inside I knew there was still hope for a brighter future. And I was right.

## **My First Coming-Out Experience**

Two grueling weeks later my missionary companion and I headed to João Pessoa for the bi-annual mission conference. After the sermons, I mustered the courage to talk with my Mission President in private. My heart was racing furiously but I knew what had to be done. As soon as I stepped into his office, I couldn't hold back my tears any longer. I quickly began sobbing before I could even sit down. I wiped away my tears and tried to compose myself as I got to the point. I explained how sorry I was that I could no longer carry on with my mission because of my same-sex attractions and unbearable depression. He asked if I had been honest about my celibacy during previous interviews. I answered with an honest "yes" and that I would stay that way. Compassionately, he told me I should continue on my mission and God would look after me because of my faithfulness to Him. He made me feel same-sex attraction was common and it could be overcome if I continued to serve the Lord diligently. He set up a time for me to speak with my Stake President back home. During that phone call, my Stake President read me some passages from The Book of Mormon regarding missionary work. He told me to be like "Captain Moroni" who was a courageous military commander. He then asked if I remembered raising my arm to the square while promising to finish my mission honorably. I said that I did and that I would do everything I could to keep my promise. He wished me God's blessing and that was the end of the conversation.

Talking with my Mission President and Stake President about my sexual attraction somehow eased my depression. At the same time, they were undoubtedly the most petrifying experiences of my life! It was the first time I had ever told anyone that I was gay! It took a near suicide for me to break down and tell someone. This was the beginning of my coming out experience; even though I was still petrified that anyone would discover my secret, it was my first step toward self-acceptance.

## **My Gay Companion**

I had been in Caicó for just over three months when the Mission President decided to transfer me to another city. I was sad to leave Caicó. Although terribly hot, it had become my home. I was assigned a new missionary companion. My current companion called him a Brazilian "crentão," an extreme hard-ass, even worse than my first! "Just what I need right now," I thought as my heart sank at the mere suggestion. There were also rumors that my new companion was gay. "Oh great! Why would God send me on a mission and give me a gay companion?" I decided to write it off as mere gossip and took my leave from Caicó.

Upon my arrival in the bairro Mangabeira, João Pessoa, I met the object of the gay speculations. He certainly was attractive indeed. As soon as he said "hello," I knew why he was rumored to be gay. He was unmistakably "flamboyant." Shortly after I arrived, we had lunch at a Mormon member's home. As quickly as our hostess left the room, he looked into the mirror and said, "What a beautiful face I see here in the mirror," as he

arranged his hair. There was an awkward silence. He turned to me and asked, "Don't you think so too?" Then he quickly followed up by, "I'm just joking" and snickered. I could not believe this was really happening to me. "God must have a cruel sense of humor!" I thought. "Or was I experiencing a terrible nightmare?"

It took two long weeks for him to allude to "the question." We stopped to sit in the shade for a break from the hot sun to drink freshly squeezed sugar cane juice. My favorite! He then began to ask me if I could keep a secret. I said "Yes, of course." He proceeded with "Have you ever had an attraction that you thought was not, how do you say... normal?" "What do you mean?" I asked innocently. He described how he felt attracted to males and didn't know why. He began to explain how liberating it was to finally have someone to talk to about it. He continued expressing how it felt "natural" talking to me about his same-sex attraction. "Others seem overly judgmental" he explained. He began discussing how difficult and confusing it all was. I wanted so badly to just yell it out! But, I kept my mouth shut. Although I was dying inside, I was afraid to say anything that would lead us to jeopardize our missions. So I kept quiet, but I think he somehow knew.

A couple of days later, my missionary companion was admiring my scripture bag. So I let him borrow it. We went out knocking on doors, but within a few hours he said he needed to rest. We sat down together inside a private room at a Mormon Church close by. I asked him what was wrong. He looked at me in a strange way and said: "I'm beginning to get, how do you say, turned on by your bag rubbing up against me and I can't take it anymore!" I didn't know what to say. He suggested we go back to the house and get his other bag. I agreed and we headed back home. I somehow sensed there was an ulterior motive. I felt excited but hesitant at the same time. I had an idea of what was in store. When we walked into the front door, we both immediately dropped our bags and began to kiss passionately. That was the first time I had truly kissed anyone with such passion. We had so much pent up sexual tension that it was difficult to contain ourselves, but, somehow, we did. Over the next four weeks we made out multiple times, but we kept our virginity intact. Almost absurdly, we believed that Satan was working hard to ruin our mission and that we must fight him together! We somehow overlooked the fact that we were two young attractive gay males forced to live together in celibacy! Torturous! It was one of the most difficult situations I had ever endured and succeeded! Our companionship together didn't last long due to this circumstance. As a "Zone Leader" of forty missionaries, my companion felt guilty and called the mission president to inform him of what had ensued. After a mere 2 months together, he was quickly transferred. We never saw each other again except briefly at mission conferences.

As I look back today, I see how life has a way of helping us accept who we are. This experience with my gay companion allowed me to express my sexuality for the first time and it was undeniably liberating. The process of self-acceptance was finally in motion. I slowly began to see a light at the end of the tunnel despite the fact I was stuck in a metaphorical tar pit. I would escape but it would take many more years of struggle before I could finally break free due to sheer desperation.

## **Mission Accomplished**

The rest of my mission was a battle to say the least. To make things worse, I had trouble memorizing the “Palestras”—short lessons designed to teach the Mormon gospel in small increments. Maybe my mother was right for holding me back in the first grade! During my whole mission, I was not able to memorize most of the Palestras; although, I could easily teach them once I mastered the language after just six months in Brazil. I never moved up in rank until the last few months of my mission. Embarrassingly, I remained Junior Missionary Companion throughout most of my missionary experience. I became quite depressed again after twelve months on my mission, when all of the other missionaries I arrived with were already Senior Companions, District Leaders, and Zone Leaders. I learned to cope by not caring about rank. I just wanted to be a good person and serve the people. I found myself helping with humanitarian needs rather than missionary responsibilities whenever possible. I taught English to the poor. I helped with construction. I painted their houses and dug their foundations. I helped the elderly. I gave food to the starving. And I learned to be happy. I loved the Brazilian people as my own family and no rank or promotion could make me happier than the people I served.

## **Home**

After two grueling years of a bittersweet existence, I finally returned home. I sincerely missed all the friends I had left behind. I was happy to be back yet sad to think that my battle was still unavoidably present. I sacrificed two whole years of my life while my attraction to males even grew stronger! The Mormon Church teaches that, if we are obedient to God and follow His Word, He will bless us with unimaginable happiness. This was certainly not my case. I surely was not happy; I was a mess! My obedience to the Mormon teachings had quite the opposite effect! It left me fearful and depressed. The worst part was thinking that God had abandoned me.

## **The Cure**

Two years after my mission, my depression worsened significantly. I was fighting my sexual feelings constantly until one night I broke down crying while talking with my father—I was depressed, suicidal, and angry at myself. Somehow, he guessed why I was crying. He showed a sense of sincere compassion as he grabbed my hand and cried with me. While it was a comforting response at the time, it also made me feel as if I had been stricken with a dreadful disease. My same-sex attraction was “unnatural” and I must be “treated” and “cured.” My father decided I should talk to my Bishop. My Bishop then advised me to remain celibate until I marry a woman one day. Only marriage between a man and a woman in the Mormon temple is how I can be reunited with God after I die. That is what I had been taught my whole life.

I was then quickly sent to see a licensed family therapist, who was also a Mormon Bishop, to undergo “conversion” or “repairative” therapy. While everyone had the best intentions at heart, they didn’t understand the agony and damage this therapy would cause. For three years, my therapist was the only person I felt I could talk to about my

“sinful nature.” He was a kind and loving man who thought he was serving God by following the Mormon Church’s instructions. Sadly, my sexuality was ignored by my father, mother, and the Church over the next three years in hopes the therapist could “solve the problem.” I felt shame and disgrace because of my same-sex attractions. I could hardly face my family. I put all my hopes into my therapist’s professional capabilities to “cure” my condition. Yet, all his efforts were in vain. The continual motivation to “repair” me only created more hopelessness. I was longing to end my life. I just wanted it all to end now! Finally, to my complete surprise, my therapist admitted that he was wrong to try and change my sexuality. He realized what distress he had caused me over the three years of conversion therapy. He told me at our last meeting that I should fall in love and live a happy life with someone I deeply care about. I was completely amazed! After so long, he told me what I always knew to be true—be true to myself and there I will find happiness. Today, it astonishes me just how long it took him to finally come to this realization, especially as a licensed therapist.

## **My Search for Love**

I finally started to date at age twenty-seven. My heart was completely innocent and open with an intense desire for a lasting connection. Unfortunately, there were few places I knew where to find meaningful love. Internet dating sites were where I turned. When I finally fell in love with an attractive young man I found online, he gave me the attention I desired. I soon realized it was only sex that he wanted from me. All the emotion, love, and passion I had for this person was dashed to pieces in an instant. Dating became extremely painful. I had no idea what I was getting myself into at this point. The Internet was the only place I knew where I could meet people. The online gay dating world was more ruthless and cruel than I could ever have imagined! I had to be patient and intuitive to find the “one.” It took two years to meet someone who filled the lonely doldrums of my heart with passion and romance. It was the love I once dreamed of as a child. The love I learned from my grandmother as she told her story of her romantic elope with my grandfather. Unfortunately, our relationship only lasted three years; I was devastated! After I recovered from the loss, I realized I couldn’t give up. My previous relationship gave me the strength to keep looking for that diamond in the rough!

## **May Peace Abound**

After eighteen years of denial, at age twenty-seven, I found the strength to completely come out to my entire family. I was once hiding in the shadows of embarrassment, but now my spirit is finally free. I feel like I’m complete when I’m around them now. I am proud of my sexuality and I have no fear of judgment, like I used to before. My family is still Mormon, but with a more profound understanding of humanity and its unique traits. It has been a slow and agonizing process, yet I have survived the journey. Today, I am here to help the world become a kinder and more thoughtful place toward all LGBTQ people alike. The ability to be loved unconditionally for who we are is something deserving of everyone. That way we may be able to pass this love on to

others. And one day, when the right person appears, we will be better equipped to maintain a long-term, loving, and committed relationship.

### **My "New Mission:" May We All Find Love**

I realized that the best way I can contribute to the success of the LGBTQ community is by sharing my life-experiences while advocating the lessons I've learned. This has become my "new mission" in life. My hope is that my experiences might shed light onto how important it is that we embrace the good in our lives while also embracing our true identities. To further help bring about this idea, I've decided to form the non-profit organization Like-Minded Partners, Inc. for the sole purpose of helping LGBTQ individuals discover their true potential for long-term, fulfilling, and loving relationships.

I have earned a Masters of Public Health (MPH) degree with a focus in public health education to become better equipped with the skills necessary to serve the LGBTQ community. I hope my studies will help offer the essential tools necessary to achieve my life's dream: to allow each LGBTQ individual the human-right to flourish in every aspect of their lives—intellectually, psychologically, romantically, healthfully, and spiritually.

### **CA Proposition 8: "The Mormon Proposition"**

Unfortunately, my battle against the Mormon-sponsored Proposition 8 only caused heartache, anger, and frustration within my family. This experience taught me a valuable yet unfortunate lesson. Religious authority over people's lives is so powerful that a person's own family would rather side with their religious leaders while denying civil liberties to their own flesh and blood. None of my Mormon family supported me during this critical time. Their cars and even homes sported Proposition 8 propaganda. Close Mormon friends, with whom I grew up and admired as a child, placed Proposition 8 banners throughout the city where I lived. Neighbors and church communities united to destroy my most deeply held dream—a chance to marry one day. My own family became so involved that my father donated thousands of dollars to the cause and was chosen to lead the Proposition 8 advocacy group for his neighborhood. It cut to my heart to know that my own family would work so relentlessly to deny me the rights and privileges that they themselves selfishly enjoyed and taught me to value.

Today, as of June 26, 2015, I'm happy to see that my dream to marry can finally be realized throughout the United States! My family is slowly coming around and becoming more accepting of LGBTQ relationships, but not marriage unfortunately. Surprisingly, I feel they are beginning to perceive LGBTQ relationship as not much different from their own; although, I might be somewhat overly optimistic at this point. It does seem they are slowly learning and adjusting. For me, it would have been very easy to abandon my family because of their anti-gay sentiments; I am glad that I didn't. I feel it is my responsibility to help them understand who I am. They need to know that my desires are not very different from their own, despite our differences. I have always believed that good people will recognize goodness in others, when given the opportunity. I hope that America's drive for equality will always surpass hatred and ignorance in this amazing country that I call my home.

## **Final Remarks**

While today I may not attend any particular organized religion specifically, I do desire to love and to be loved—the true substance of our spiritual existence. I feel our spirituality is a means by which we can grow to understand who we are and how to enrich love for a greater happiness in our lives. My culminating experiences have lead me to believe that service, charity, and love are what bring us closer to an understanding of life. Ultimately, I desire to grow in my own understanding of myself and the world while searching to add more peace, love and acceptance in this world we all share.

Thank you for the time you've taken to read my autobiography. I hope these experiences might help inspire compassion and acceptance in a world full of misunderstanding and intolerance. My aspiration is that we all learn to look upon one another's human differences with respect and dignity; human diversity is one of humankind's greatest assets. Although, as time passes, we might all begin to realize that, lovingly, we are not so very different at all.

~ Seth R. Ferreira, MPH