

DELIVERED FROM DESPAIR – TOM COLE

Tom and his wife, Donna, are the founders of Only the Cross Ministries, in Kansas City. He and his wife are on staff at the International House of Prayer where Tom serves as the head of pastoral care. He was the director of Reconciliation Ministries for ten years.

I was the third son in a family of six children. My parents had been hoping for a girl; from the time I was very young, my mother told me that, if I had been a girl, my name would have been Debbie.

My lack of interest in contact sports alienated me from the other boys in the neighborhood. When we lined up to pick teams, I would be last and someone would remark, "Oh no, we got stuck with Cole. He's a sissy." Each time my heart grew colder and harder.

Ugly Names

As far back as I can remember, I was called names like fag, queer and sissy. My gentle demeanor and compassionate nature, on the other hand, made me compatible with the neighborhood girls; soon they became my sole source of friendship.

One day in fifth grade, our teacher tried an experiment in communication. She had the class gather in a circle and talk about the things that bothered them. Suddenly I became the subject of conversation. The boys in the class began to complain, "Cole is a fag. We don't want to sit by him or work on projects with him." When the teacher asked me how I felt about these comments, I ran from the classroom, crying and feeling sick to my stomach. School became a dichotomy: I loved to learn, but I feared the daily harassment.

One day I came home scraped and beaten, and my father said, "If you're going to make it in this world, you're going to have to fight."

"But Daddy, I'm afraid to fight." In response, his face turned red with anger. He forced my hands up and started jousting with his fists, but I only stood there and cried. I hated my father for forcing me to be something I could never be. I despised other males and vowed in my heart that I would never be like them.

"A New Game"

Then an older boy in the neighborhood began to show attention to me and I was elated. But one day when we were playing in his back yard, he led me into his tent and said, "I have a new game for us to play." He began to undress and told me to do the same. As he sexually molested me, I felt fear, revulsion and the need to get away. Mixed with these negative feelings were sensations of physical pleasure. Afterward I avoided my friend and buried the incident deep in my memory.

About age 12, I began to experiment sexually with other boys in the neighborhood. One neighbor and I began a six-year physical relationship. I felt cheapened by these experiences; now I had friends, but I saw that they only wanted me for their sexual release.

Visiting Gay Bars

In college, I majored in music and drama. I joined a vocal jazz ensemble and met a male singer who was "out of the closet" with his homosexuality. One day I

asked if he would take me to a gay bar, and he readily agreed. I felt fear and excitement as I anticipated the experience. I was 19 years old, but most people thought I looked 14 or 15.

When we entered the bar, I noticed that many of the men were staring at me. I felt like an animal on display in the zoo. But I also loved the attention. I met a much older man and we planned a date for the following week. He lavished attention on me, and I loved it. But after a few times together, he seemed to lose interest in me; the next week, I saw him with another guy who looked even younger than me.

I found it difficult to enter into a long-term relationship with other men. One time I asked a group of gay friends, "Don't you think it's a little strange that all we talk about and think about is sex? Is that what the average heterosexual is like?" No one responded, but I knew that what we were experiencing wasn't right.

A Shocking Discovery

One night I was shocked to see my younger brother at the club. We had both experienced many of the same things in our lives and we shared a close friendship until his death eight years later in a tragic car accident.

I saw my brother in a seemingly healthy gay relationship and thought, Maybe it can work after all. But then I watched the relationship deteriorate to a violent end, and I lost hope for a long-term gay relationship. From the age of 19 until I was 26, I had 300-400 sexual partners. Depression set in; I began to drink and use cocaine to deaden the loneliness.

One night, in total despair, I decided to end my life. I took a large amount of painkillers and a fifth of vodka. I awoke the next day feeling like I had been run over by a truck. I was alive -- but still miserable.

Relationship with Jesus

Soon after, I met a woman at work named Rosie who constantly talked about a personal relationship with Jesus. When I brought up some of my New Age beliefs, she always responded in love--and never condemned me as a homosexual. One night she said, "My husband and I will be praying for you."

I was shocked. "You pray for me?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "We pray for you every night."

As she was leaving, she added, "Tom, I love you." Something broke inside; the love of God reached out through Rosie and touched my heart. I hid my head under a counter, pretending to clean, while I wept.

Finding Something Different in Church

Within a few weeks, I asked Rosie if I could attend church with her. That Sunday, I sensed something different. People hugged one another and sang with such love to Jesus. At the end of the service, I went forward to receive Jesus Christ into my life.

I began telling people of my life before Christ and asking for their prayers. Then I met Donna, a former lesbian, at a prayer meeting and we began a prayer

partnership. After two years of studying the Bible and praying together, I knew my feelings for her were more than friendship.

One day Donna came to visit me at work. For the first time, I noticed her well-endowed figure and felt strongly attracted to her. I realized that, at age 26, I was experiencing something most boys go through at puberty. Soon Donna and I were dating. Three months later, we were married.

Entering Marriage--and Finding New Problems

Our first year of marriage was torture as my insecurities poured out. I began to seek solace in phone sex with men. Then I heard a broadcast on homosexuality, featuring an interview with Dr. Elizabeth Moberly. As she spoke about same-gender deficits, I realized that I had many close female friends in my life, but no significant male friendships. I asked God to send men to me with whom I could share my struggles. The Lord was faithful and sent two men within the next year. They were gentle and compassionate, and held me accountable.

God also sent me another friend to whom I would have been strongly attracted back in my gay life. I was nervous and uneasy as we attended a weekend conference together. I decided to share my insecurities with him and said I was afraid of getting close to other men.

He responded with wisdom and gentle love. "Just because I've never struggled with homosexuality doesn't mean that I don't fear intimacy." Then he explained that men often talk about weather or sports to avoid discussing their feelings and what is really happening in their lives. I was shocked and relieved. Slowly I was learning that I could be intimate with a man without being sexual with him.

When my wife gave birth to our first child, I asked God, "How do I raise a son?" I sensed His response in my heart: "Just love him." Today Isaac is 100 percent all boy. Shortly after him came another son, then two daughters. My children are one of life's greatest joys.

Joy in Helping Others

As my wife and I both found freedom from a gay past, we began to minister to others seeking the same experience. Four years ago, we joined the board of directors of Reconciliation, our local Exodus ministry in Detroit. Two years later, I became the director.

Today our vision is to help Christians who long for change in their homosexual desires. We don't force our beliefs on anyone, but seek to display the compassion of Jesus Christ to anyone who is interested. I know His love can draw others out of despair, just as He did for me.

If you would like more information about Reconciliation Ministries of Michigan, or any of the ministries we offer, visit us on the internet at www.recmin.org, or call (586) 739-5114. You may also e-mail us at info@recmin.org. **All correspondence will be kept strictly confidential.**

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