

Maybe she was doing better. She was not wearing pajamas and she was noticeably thinner when she took me and my two brothers to the office of what I understood to be a counselor. The counselor must have been a family therapist or social worker, but his or her credentials are about as memorable to me as his or her gender or anything about his or her office. All I can recall are scattered phrases connected by long teary pauses as my stepmother tried to tell us something that she couldn't tell us at home.

I don't know how to tell you.

People might not talk to you if they knew.

You may have heard it called a lot of different things.

From these vague snippets I somehow sensed what was coming. I don't know exactly how she finally said it. Or maybe it was the counselor. I just remember one loud, angry word: QUEER. And then I was numb. I didn't feel anything. Not sad or angry or even confused. Just numb. It would take years of therapy with a series of my own counselors before I could start feeling my feelings. In the meantime, I had Barry and food to comfort me and keep those feelings at bay.

I didn't understand what being gay meant. I once called my brother's friend a fagot and my father slapped me hard across the face. Something he had never done before or since. I didn't know what the word meant and nobody took the trouble to explain it to me. I had heard it used derogatorily by boys at school, just as they called each other pussies, and I knew what *that* was. I looked up fagot in the dictionary, and learned it had something to do with cigarettes or a bundle of sticks. I was pretty sure that my dad wouldn't have slapped me for calling someone a bundle of sticks.

TK When I was in high school, I chose homosexuality as the theme for my senior

Comment [JN12]: When is this – days later, weeks, months?

Comment [JN13]: What did you sense was coming?

Comment [LF14]: Who is gay? It's unclear here if it's your stepmother or father

Comment [JN15]: This is great

Comment [JN16]: great

Comment [JN17]: you mean right at the beginning – right after the counselor -- or over time? Make it more clear

Comment [JN18]: how old?

Comment [JN19]: great

Comment [JN20]: somewhere between the bundle of sticks and the paper, you learned what it was. When was that? What did you think about it and your dad?