

## Gut Feelings

by Rolanda Powell

To tell you the truth, my childhood dreams were probably a little different than most girls who grew up in my neighborhood. I planned on following in the footsteps of some of my biggest idols. I dreamed of becoming a filmmaker like Spike Lee or following in Muggsy Bogues' footsteps (who was the shortest player in the NBA) - and become a professional WNBA star myself. Honestly, getting engaged to my high school sweetheart was the farthest thing from my mind.

At 17, I reluctantly agreed, hoping that eventually I would get on board. I really thought that by the time I was 22 and a college graduate surely I'd ready. But as the years went by, I never got closer to the idea of walking down the aisle with him. We ended up going our separate ways but during our five year engagement, I always wondered, "Why did I really put off our wedding?"

I kept searching this heavy question and I found myself turning to my family church for answers. As the saying goes, "The Lord works in mysterious ways". It was one particular Sunday morning, I heard my Aunt preach about the 'sins of homosexuality'. As she spoke, something resonated in me like no other sermon had ever done before. Right there, I had a true

epiphany and said to myself, 'that's why I didn't want to marry my ex, I'm gay!'"

In the middle of a Bible-thumping, foot stomping, southern Baptist service, God answered my prayer and helped me understand why I couldn't marry my ex. You know, the funny thing was, what was intended to make me feel damnation, had the opposite effect on me. It gave me a new joy and an honest feeling of acceptance about who I was. I fell to my knees in gratitude. Who would've thought that sermon would have sparked a curiosity in me that I never knew I had? Suddenly it all became clear to me. I was so moved that I could finally explain my inner conflict. It set me off on a journey of self-discovery to learn more about my sexuality and my feelings.

After a lot of soul searching, I knew one thing for sure. I couldn't be a lesbian while living in my hometown. I thought, my only chance to live a "gay" life was to move far, far away and as fate would have it, a job opening aligned for me to relocate to Atlanta, the Gay capital of the South.

Even though I lived hundreds of miles away from home, I still couldn't find the courage to be my authentic self with my family. For years, I managed to live a double life. I put on makeup and heels when my parents came to town, but wore Polo's and cargo shorts when they were away. Living in the closet is a hard life to live, as I was constantly second guessing my words

and my actions as to never come off as "too gay" in front of my family.

As I continued with my internal struggle, I met a woman and fell deeply in love. We were inseparable. She was the kind of girl you could bring home to your mother. And so I did. I introduced her to my family while leaving out one important detail. They had no clue that my new best friend (who was helping me navigate my way in the big city) was actually my girlfriend. As my best friend, she was always welcomed to stay in the guest bedroom when visiting my parents' house. When my parents gifted us two plane tickets to Vegas sending us happily on vacation together, I thought this grand gesture was evidence that they loved her as much as I did, so I decided to come out.

Finally finding the courage to come clean, I announced Mom, Dad, I am a lesbian. Sure enough, they had no clue. And to make matters worse, I hit them with a double whammy. Mom, Dad, not only is she my girlfriend but we're getting married, too. They were extremely upset! Not under any circumstances would they have condoned my "homosexual" relationship in their home.

Needless to say, they didn't attend the wedding.

After years of resentment, bitterness, and a lot of prayers, I came to understand how honesty plays an important role in acceptance. Being gay is not a choice but being honest is. My parents couldn't know the real me if I kept important things so

secretive from them. I decided to share all of myself with my parents, including my love life. Being honest to myself meant getting off the rollercoaster of doubt, shame, and guilt. It will take more time for them to fully accept me as I am, but I pray that someday my spouse will be a welcome guest in their home again. But since I started this journey of acceptance, I have recognized that being honest - to myself and to others - is one of my most valued life lessons. I have also learned to extend the same grace I gave myself to my parents. Understanding acceptance doesn't always happen overnight.