

soulnotskin

becoming the me I was meant to be

JEN SLUMAC

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When I was in college, I met a most intriguing gay couple, Poe and Jerry. They were intellectuals, writers, and practicing Christians. They were out of the closet at work, on the college campus, and they still called themselves Christians. I was riveted.

There were times in the midst of my madness during those years when I was ashamed or frightened or lonely, that I would call one of them up as a surrogate to God. Poe and Jerry adored me; they saw the pressure I was under on and off campus in the local community as *The Lesbian Advocate*. They knew I was young and newly outed through my comic strip, so they trusted I had too much to carry. They always invited me over to talk. They made dinner for me and a date once, and I had the opportunity to ask questions about becoming a writer, a professor, and also a Christian. I was interested in all of those things.

That evening at their apartment, talking about Christianity with two men who loved each other and loved Jesus planted a seed in me. The aroma of dinner cooking, warm-colored décor, a worn Bible on the coffee table and lit candles created a cozy atmosphere that attached to the idea of God and Gay co-existing. Their conviction was so clear—in both their identity as gay men and their identity in Christ—that I left with even more information to wade through. The most important part is that Poe told me while he hugged me that God

loved me and had a plan for my life, and that I was good. I kept their phone number after I graduated college and carried it with me for years as a grain of hope. A lifeline.

I was wasted the evening I dialed that long-distance number. I slurred through my receiver that I didn't want to live anymore; I couldn't stand myself. I told Poe I couldn't hold onto a relationship to save my life, that I couldn't hold a job. I had nothing left but alcohol and it was going to kill me. I told him that God was so disappointed in me that I needed him to do me a huge favor. I asked him if he would pray and put in a good word for me, to please tell God I was trying, and I didn't know what else to do. I told him I called because he was a gay Christian, and I hoped he could tell me why I felt so insane and hopeless.

His response has never left me.

Calmly and warmly, he asked me to sit down and listen. I sat down and held the receiver with two hands for dear life. He told me that God had given me so many gifts, and I was hurting and miserable because I had been acting ungrateful. God wanted me to use the gifts he gave me, and I wouldn't find peace until I did.

That night I didn't want to be alone, so I went over to a friend's house to watch a movie with her family. I drank a twelve-pack before going. I sat on the floor between their 'his and hers' chairs while she folded laundry. His socks. This pile. Her panties. That pile. Her son's jeans. Over there.

The tricky thing about shame is that everything and nothing at all can ignite it. Instead of enjoying a movie and relaxing, I wanted a drink. Her life was so normal; by contrast I felt like a pathetic freak. I didn't have his and hers chairs and never will. I don't have kids' stuff and never will. I'm just a lonely gay woman with no real prospect for future partnership. Shame loves the unspoken triggers because they are everywhere, and they bind perfectly with self-centered pity. Shame wins.

I was squirming with discomfort, and finally got up to go. I ran out of the house and into the driveway to leave. I needed to get as far away from there as I could. I went home and called my college friend Henry who lived in Minneapolis, a man well learned in my drinking. I told Henry I was coming out. It was 1:30 a.m. He asked if I'd been drinking. I said no.

My brother gave me a map, cell phone, and a nervous glance, knowing that once I had set my mind to something...I jumped in my car and on that trip, I drove off the road twice falling asleep at the wheel. I had two cups of coffee and about five caffeine pills, but I hadn't slept all night, and I was fighting that sleepy haze that comes when drinks are wearing off.

I drove through the night and into the morning, my mind obsessing the whole way. As I approached the St. Paul skyline, I called Henry to say I was almost there. At that moment my heart began to race, I felt clammy. I dropped the phone. I had smoked about two packs of cigarettes on the drive, not to mention before I'd left. I pulled my car to the shoulder and stood watching the skyline, certain it was the last thing I'd ever see. I was convinced I was

having a heart attack. My face, chest, fingers, belly, and arms were numb. I was banging on my chest, trying to make something work.

Henry calmly talked me down from panic over the phone. When I got to his house, I called into work for three days, claiming a friend of mine from high school had pulled a spontaneous marriage in Minneapolis and I wasn't going to miss it for the world. Ridiculous yet plausible stories fell from my lips all the time to justify my erratic behavior. I left that message on my boss's machine and went to sleep for the next nine hours.

When I woke up, I didn't know where I was. After a few minutes, the horror of the night before began to play across my mind. Watching the movie of my life without alcohol in me was torture. I didn't know how much longer I could stand to take responsibility for the things my shadow side did while drinking. I was too ashamed to claim my life.

I proceeded for three days to divorce myself from reality and my responsibilities. I read a book called *Mere Christianity*. Henry had found God. He and I had always philosophized about it in college, but he'd really found God again, and I could see he was at tremendous peace. He suggested the book and I read it. We talked. I walked. I drank and obsessed. I drove home.

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