

2007: Gay Life at School

I'm writing a book on love as if love were a degree I was earning in a spiritual school; as if God was my Teacher, and I, life's pupil. My birth was the date of my enrollment, and I'll die upon graduation. And although my parents were my first tutors of love, everyone on Earth has become a tutor since I left that homeroom at my mother's knee. Today some offer me lessons on how to live; others are simply examples of what not to do. By the time I die I hope to have a rich transcript of classes passed in the lessons of love.

Being a *gay* student in this one-room schoolhouse on earth has been anything but easy. So many of our straight classmates have insisted we be expelled from the school of life for the way we learn about love. These narrow-minded students who slam their fist down on religious textbooks think they're the Teacher's pet, sitting in the front row of life. And as they turn their back on the Teacher to stare at us who sit at the back of the class, they accuse *us* of failing abominably...

As a young man I suffered from severe mental illness, a personal test so arduous and painful that I felt, at the time, I really *was* failing my classmates. My drug addiction and sexual compulsivity definitely *did* get in the way of my studies of love. And I even sensed the Teacher was warning me when I lost my career in ballet to drugs; cherished friends to AIDS; and a lover of many years to apathy; because I wasn't applying myself fully enough to life's lessons.

I have to admit now I was truant from class because I really only wanted to play; I had no interest in learning. I lived in a fantasy of *mock* needs that exceeded any spiritual education: I needed to be popular; I did anything I could to be liked. But I did little to earn the greater reward of respect from others. My grades in life and love were abysmal, and it showed.

The Teacher put me on probation many times, but I continued to refuse to do my spiritual homework. I really *wanted* to get expelled. I thought I could get away with murder if I could just get people to like me. That was until I attempted suicide, driving my car off a 200-foot-high cliff. I got away with murder then, but on a far more serious scale... Today I think that *pride* doesn't come before the fall - arrogance does.

The road to spiritual recovery was long and arduous. It began by getting clean and sober at the age of thirty-one. That was twenty-three years ago, and I learned a lot about the curriculum of love since. Specifically, I learned that the wisest course of study was to learn to love myself first. That's why I changed my major in the school of life from others to *me*. I couldn't give love to another man that I hadn't first accepted for myself.

But self-love for a man born gay and a child of Jewish, Holocaust survivors seemed, at first, to be an impossible class to pass. I found I had to prepare for it with many prerequisite courses in learning just to *like* myself. For decades, that was challenge enough.

Thanks to the gay recovery community of San Francisco, I found I could build a spiritual foundation in my *heart* for the dream house within that I yearned for. I began by caring for my physical health. Then, together with my heart and mind, I had three stories to build a spiritual foundation upon. With a foundation in learning, a healthy body, a sound mind and a good heart, luck then strolled into my life as gay spiritual *craftsmen* who modeled how to build that virtual temple within.

They whispered that I'd have to *want* to learn about me; I was too old anymore to be forced to do so. And with the curiosity and passion for life I developed for myself, came formidable lessons about my personal truth. *Then* I was able to give back to others.

While helping my gay brothers, I discovered that humility is the sole requirement for learning. Family and friends in the past who hadn't treated me kinder had done so because they, like me, didn't have the prerequisite humility to learn. Fortunately, the gay community modeled humility *for* me in the thirty-five years since Stonewall. Gays never *commanded* respect from the straight world; we simply demonstrated we deserved it.

Seeing my own lessons in the struggles of others has helped me learn to laugh. That's how my own burdens have been mysteriously lifted. Laughter has become like an arm-around-the-shoulders squeeze by a handsome man. Despite some pretty bad grades in the school of life, laughter has encouraged me to continue to learn.

Over time I learned to read people, to see a good book inside everyone, regardless of the cover. I even decided to go for my Ph.D. in Love. But what I really need now is a study partner to help with some of love's questions that I'll never be able to answer on my own.