

My Tale
by Mariah

I've been pondering over this for quite some time ever since I found out about the Coming Out Tales. In thinking about it, I wouldn't say I really had a time where I, "came out";. I would say it's been more of a process rather than an event for me. I remember not being very happy as a child and the awareness that I was somehow "different"; from other kids hit me when I was about 13. I realized there was something more to the feelings I had for some of my female friends. I tried to ignore it as I thought this wasn't "normal"; to feel physical attraction towards girls and I was only suppose to feel that way for men. I never knew where I got that idea from because I don't recall my parents . ever telling me that and in hindsight I see that I probably derived that from society. The whole marry a man, 2 kids, white picket fence deal. So, I went on my merry way continuing to date boys. I felt OK with this to a certain extent and there was one or 2 I loved yet that yearning to be with women became stronger and stronger as the years rolled on.

Thirteen seems to be the year where many things happened and changed for me and when I got into drugs and alcohol. I believe I did this to fit in partly and to escape from how I was feeling inside. I was mostly a "blackout"; drinker and evidently was quite scandalous at times. I went in the Navy at 22, yet another escape from reality because things just weren't working out for my life in general. I wanted to have a career, always wanted to do the Navy thing since I was 18, so I went for it.

As you might have guessed I got even more heavily into partying, us sailors have that reputation for being boozers, well I'll just speak for me, I was. The whole career thing went down the toilet, I got in trouble for being late for work, not showing up at all, so on and so forth. My first duty station was in the Philippines where all the trouble happened because my life revolved around getting loaded and laid. I found that this was a way of getting the love and attention I felt I was lacking and I believe the more I was with men, perhaps this would get the draw to women out of my system; men and booze I thought was the answer to all my problems. I was with my first woman over there at age 22 a local gal I met in one of the bars. She was really sweet to me but I destroyed that with my drinking and lousy behaviors when I was drinking and blacked out. I dated a few Filipino women while I was there and one night, evidently in a black out, I slept with one of my friends, also in the Navy, a

really great Mexican woman whom I was attracted to and lived to regret that because I really liked her and didn't want things to begin and end that way between us.

Well, all this went on for the 2 1/2 years I was stationed there, then I was stationed in Northern California in the Bay area. I was pretty miserable there, still drinking and back to dating just men, because I had no support system and this is not something you make public knowledge in the Navy, so I was in the closet still. I dated this one guy I really cared about and wanted to marry me but I ended up having to come clean about my confusion and suspicions about my true sexuality, so as you may have guessed he and I broke up.

I had a couple one night stands with some women, which was pretty degrading but I didn't know what to do with what I was feeling and going through, didn't know anything about being gay, what to do, how to get hooked up with other gay people and so forth. I had lots of shame and guilt behind what I was dealing with and pretty much just wished it would go away so I wouldn't have to deal with it. I just wanted to be "normal"; so I kept trying to date men here and there, sleep and drink it away.

My next duty station was at what was then N.A.S. Miramar in San Diego. After awhile one of my supervisors confronted me about my drinking and smelling like booze at work. This was when I finally was able to admit I had a problem and long story short I ended up at in-patient alcohol rehab for 6 weeks. I finally found a place where I felt accepted for me and discovered I am an alcoholic and began on the road of learning about me and accepting me for who I am. At times it's been a long road to hoe but I'm doing it. I told my family about my alcoholism and sexuality several years ago don't recall exactly when, just remember I did it over the phone because they are on the East coast and it was really easy to tell my mom but it was difficult to tell my dad cause I thought he would judge me. Well, I got past that and he accepts me too the way I am, even though we go head to head sometimes we have an OK relationship. I'm closest to my mother, always have been and probably always will be because she's more sensitive like me and my dad has a self admitted A-type personality which I don't deal with very well. My one sibling a younger sister accepts me for me as well, the alcoholic and lesbian part anyway. She's more like my dad so we don't always see eye to eye either but it's getting better between us.

So, essentially this whole process has been more a self acceptance thing more than anything else. I've spent almost the last 3 years in therapy as well and this has been one of the issues looked at and dealt with, my relationships with others and so forth. I am the most comfortable with myself today than I have been in my whole life, I have a great support network with my friends in AA and now that I'm in the United Student Pride club I have that much more support, acceptance and knowledge about stuff. I can now finally call myself a proud lesbian and don't care anymore what others think but that started with my caring about myself and accepting me for who I am in all regards.