

# INSIDE AND OUT

Inside and Out is unique! It is a compilation of writings from LGBT people within HMP/YOI Parc- both prisoners and staff alike. The stories are as diverse as the individuals who wrote them. They include all ages and all abilities and are from different backgrounds and upbringings united in their fear of ridicule, upsetting parents and even violence. These small but brave voices from an unlikely place shout out their messages and assert their places in society. You cannot fail to be moved by their accounts that inspire and inform.

Phil Forder  
Arts and Community Lead



# INSIDE AND OUT



**LGBT WRITING FROM HMP/YOI PARC**  
**Foreword by Peter Tatchell**

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**LGBT writing from Parc 2015**

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## PREFACE

Inside and Out is a collection of honest, brave and highly personal accounts by LGBT men and women who find themselves living and working in the prison system; a subject that has been hitherto barely and rarely talked about.

This book is ground-breaking. It is the result of various creative workshops in Parc Prison, South Wales, and answers questions such as: What is it like to be a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) prisoner or member of staff? How difficult is it to come out behind bars? What happens when you do? Are LGBT experiences in prisons always negative?

Jail offers a lot of time for reflection and many of those incarcerated often ponder on their lives thus far. Some of the stories here are memories of coming out and the difficulties that ensued. These include stories about growing up in macho cultures, such as the traveller community, as in Anthony's story or in fundamental religious circles such as Denny's. Many express fears of ridicule and being disowned surprisingly by those who are usually closest to them - their parents and other family members, as well as cell mates on the wing.

Some stories, like that of Kristian, are told as funny accounts of his self-conscious youth which, as the years have passed, have enabled him to look back and smile.

There are depictions of the difficulties faced by gay people in prison and the support they do and don't get. Transgender prisoners often have to battle extra hard to win acceptance in the macho prison culture where traditional gender expectations usually prevail.

The spectrum of positive and negative experiences on the inside is as diverse as for LGBT people inside as it is on the out.

Staff stories are of equal interest. Men and women working in prisons often deliberately hide their sexual orientation so that prisoners won't find out and use it as leverage against them.

Some LGBT staff have written personal accounts of events that have shaped their lives outside of prison (such as Adrian's story) and their quest to be who they are. Rachel's account is about being LGBT in the armed forces when it was illegal and having to change her vocational calling.

The writing is of mixed ability and quality; reflecting the various levels of literacy in the prison population. Some stories are exceptionally good - endearing, informative, joyful, entertaining and sometimes painful.

Fortunately, we have the Equality Act 2010, which protects LGBT individuals (and others) from discrimination. However, it would be naive to think that just because the law has changed from persecution to protection that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are past history.

Within the UK there are geographical areas that are less LGBT tolerant than others, as well as there being cultural, age, ethnic, faith and class differences.

Being gay can be a post code lottery as to whether you are accepted or not. This applies to prisons too and within prisons it can also vary between different wings.

Behind bars, with restricted options, is probably one of the most difficult places to be LGBT, for both offenders and staff alike. As in the wider world, some of the most macho and homophobic men are often those most struggling with their own sexualities and identities. They often feel the need to run with the pack in order to be accepted.

Individuals who stand out and don't conform to the 'norm' because of their sexuality or gender identity can find it tough. They may be targeted, ostracised, teased or bullied.

That being said, times are changing inside many prisons. The jail community is catching up with the now greater tolerance and acceptance afforded to LGBT people on

the outside, as the contributors to this book testify in their personal stories.

It is a brave thing to put pen to paper about such private matters that could leave the contributors open to ridicule and abuse.

The result is a diverse collection of the voices and aspirations of those who have taken the all-important step to come out and be themselves.

This is all the more commendable given that LGBT prisoners and staff are in a closed institution and vulnerable in ways that LGBT people in the wider society are not. They are talking without many of the safety nets and escape routes that most LGBT people take for granted.

I commend this pioneering initiative by the LGBT staff and prisoners at Parc. Where they lead, may others follow.

*Peter Tatchell - Director, Peter Tatchell Foundation*

## COMING OUT AT SIXTEEN

When I think about my 'Coming out' I always try to remember who I had come out to exactly. I suppose, for many years I didn't consider myself gay because I didn't sleep with men or wear pink or listen to Madonna or really interact with other gay people. I didn't find them offensive, maybe a little intimidating, maybe I was slightly envious of their attitude to how open they could be and how others accepted their openness and self-acceptance and held them in high esteem as a result of it. My self-proclaimed coming out seems nothing more than a series of accidental and semi-accidental events strung together in such a way that led to me informing a single person of one thing. In the words of the well known philosopher Gloria Gaynor 'I am what I am'.

As a child I was what would be called socially awkward. I remember being eight or nine and playing kiss chase in the playground with other children. Needless to say, whoever had informed the other children about not persuing members of the same sex had not informed me. I remember being called Gay at school by Jamie. I asked what that meant and he did not know. He never said it again.

I was 16 when I first went to a gay bar. I was studying for my A levels. My best friend at the time was Gemma, she was a year older than me and had a car. Gemma wore Doc Martin boots and no make-up- she looked so lesbian even though she was straight. She was the captain of the local darts team and could easily hold down 10 pints . One day in Swansea, we decided to go for a drink. She said she knew a bar that would serve us as they never checked ID. It was a gay bar. The bar was in the Marina and we took ages trying to decide whether to go in or not. Eventually we took the plunge and the decor

inside, to my surprise, was stylish and clean. Mauve, purple, chrome and not a hint of pink. The only giveaway was the rainbow flag above the bar.

We stumbled through the doors feeling very self conscious. Everyone turned to look. The walk to the bar seemed the longest in my life. I felt everyone's eyes burning in the back of my head. Having gone this far we had to go through with it.

Marc came to serve us. I knew his name was Marc because he wore a badge with his name on it.

"Hey Guys! What can I get you" he asked in a chirpy voice.

He was so handsome and sophisticated. He was sophisticated because his name was spelt with a c

My mouth started talking as if detached from my head.

'My name is Kristian and it's spelt with a K'.

Bollocks!, That was my opening line. His first impression of me must be a dickhead. A catastrophe of the highest order. I was so embarrassed. My trousers may well have fallen down.

Marc had blond hair, blue eyes, flawless porcelain skin and you knew he had a toned body. He was about 20 and wore a surfy t-shirt, jean shorts and flip flops.

Gemma was wearing an unseasonal hoodie, boy jeans and lesbian Timberland boots. She reeked of lesbian.

On reflection I couldn't have looked more gay if I'd tried. A tight Versace couture t shirt, washed denim levi shorts and white fabric shoes- how the hell had nobody guessed? My Dior sunglasses were encrusted with diamonds and were perched on my head.

There was a momentary silence.

'Your name is Marc and you spell it with a C' I explained but still no-one spoke, the silence told me I had made it worse. Gemma kicked me gently under the bar and tried to save the situation by blurting out something about all the years I'd spent in private school not having been wasted. In between she laughed like a hyena, I was so humiliated. I tried to laugh too but just snorted like a pig.



'OK then! What can I get you to drink?' He asked almost hesitantly as if not expecting an answer.

'Two pints of lager, Carling if on draught, Heinken if not.' Gemma uttered her practiced lines flawlessly and saved the day at least for the moment. Well at least she hadn't made the situation worse.

'That'll be £4-50 please

Marc was pouring the drinks. We had got away with it. No ID. This was brill- this was the drink of champions. (Actually, I cant abide the taste of lager, it tastes like camel's piss.)

Marc with a 'c' placed the drinks before us and took our money, I handed him a crumpled £5 note and realised my hands were shaking. As he took it, his hand touched mine and I felt myself blushing. It was a Mills and Boon moment.

'KKKKKeep the change' I stammered.

'Thanks Kristian with a' K' and he winked at me.

When I sat down I couldn't stop smiling. Gemma told me that she hadn't realised getting served in a pub would make me so happy and she pointed out that I seemed very relaxed too. I told her that it was the effect of the alcohol but I think it was that I had found my new sense of self. I was finally home.

It would be another two rounds before Gemma would leave the pub and as my alcohol levels increased so did my bravery. We had moved back to the bar and occupied the bar stools so that we (I meant to say I) could talk to the wonderful Marc with a 'c'. He was chatty and talked about all his likes which were all 'normal', his good relationship with his mother, how he was studying law at university and that he worked in the bar to pay for his rent. I sat there wide eyed -probably staring too much- here was a creature of myth and legend.

Gemma, as if all of a sudden, realised she was playing gooseberry. began nervously tapping at her phone, looking out the window or staring at the wall while I continued to ask Marc with a 'c' questions. Gemma was getting fidgetty, maybe she was already thinking that any minute Marc with a 'c' was

going to start asking me questions. Gemma was a useless liar, she was even more useless when others were lying.

'How old are you then?' asked Marc suddenly.

To my surprise I blurted out 'eighteen - born on eighth of October 1980' I amazed myself at how easy it flowed out and I was pleased I'd remembered to add the extra two years.

'I'm starting university in September.'

'Really in what?'

'Dunno yet I got four straight A's'. Marc whistled and Gemma shuddered.

'O and I love darts.'

Marc suddenly was called away to serve someone else and Gemma leaned over and whispered

'Babe? Do you know what? I think you might be gay?' I was so drunk I thought she said

'Bay? Now what? oo u fink oo may'ay?'

Then I realised what she had said. After picking my jaw up off the floor, I gained my composure –sort of- and replied

'Don't be so bloody stupid Gem, we are only talking. You are always saying I should meet more people.'

'OK' she replied and as if on cue her phone beeped a text . 'Babe., I gotta go! But if you want to stay here then I'll come and pick you up later if you want.'

'Too Bloody Right' I thought and before I could answer Gemma was chatting to Marc and I could hear they were discussing the logistics of me/alcohol/getting home etc. When I looked up Gemma had gone and Marc with a 'c' was back in front of me.

'My shifts finally over' he said. 'You fancy a drink?'

This seemed just too good to be true. How could a bullfrog like me pull one of God's angels? However, I was not so naive to realise my impending fall from grace-or the bar stool-which ever came first was going to sting like a bitch.

I decided to talk less and listen more and as I did my phone buzzed. I struggled to see the screen as it lit up on one bar. I vaguely made out- one new message. I poked at it with

my finger till it opened up and was genuinely warmed by what I read – or alternatively I had unknowingly wet myself.

‘Hope you are enjoying yourself –be good- call me when you want picking up. G’

Marc was still talking about the stresses of university life and his home in Newtown, or Nottingham or Norfolk, I do remember it began with an N. I wasn’t really listening, I was thinking ‘why hadn’t I told Gemma I was gay? What was I scared of?’

When I focussed again on Marc with a ‘c’, I realised his hand was on my leg. I started. I didn’t know what to say. Maybe he didn’t realise his hand was on my thigh. Maybe I wasn’t tactile. Maybe he was coming on to me. I had to say something.

‘Err your hand seems to be resting on my thigh.’ I whispered it and looked around as if others were listening.

‘Shall we go outside and get some fresh air, it’s stuffy in here?’ he whispered back ignoring what I just said. Clever move!

I must have agreed for I found myself struggling to get off the barstool and had great problems staying vertical.

Given that the recollection of what happened next may well have been romanticised by my intake of alcohol – the beer goggles syndrome, but this is what I think happened next.

Marc put his arm round me and steadied me and led me outside to a doorway next door that was closed. He turned to face me and placed the palm of his hand on my chest and gently pushed my back against the wall. His other arm he put around me and drew his body to mine. (The reality was probably more like I stumbled back against the wall as I’d lost all co-ordination.)

Anyway, we definitely started kissing and it was at that point I started thinking ‘Yes I really am gay’.

Then as if from nowhere, the thought of a police car pulling up would be so embarrassing and we were in the

street, and if we got arrested, OH MY GOD - it **would** be so embarrassing. We needed to stop but how to say it. All the time I was thinking what to say and started making up a Shakespearian style speech. When ready I gently pushed Marc away from me and looking into his eyes I said

'Marc?'

'Yeah! Mr K'

But before I could say another word, without warning I vomitted all down Marc's arm.

Marc with a 'c' jumped back and started swearing, apparantly the t-shirt was new and had cost a fortune. 'You've bloody ruined it'. He stormed off back to the bar.

I fumbled in my pocket and pulled out my phone.

'Hi Babe, Hows it going? You Ok? I guess you want picking up.'

I was crying. I sobbed down the phone and managed to say

'Yes Gemm pick me up, PLEASE!.'

'Be there in 10, Love you Babe.'

She hung up. In the minutes on my own that followed I realised being gay wasn't that bad. Gemma still loved me and guys found me attractive and despite the fact I could never go to that bar again for years, it had been a good afternoon.

*Kristian - prisoner - HMP Parc*

## TELLING THE PARENTS

My name is Susan, I am 28 years old and I first knew that I was gay when I went to university in 2004 (aged 18). I played rugby for the college and started finding girls attractive. I went out to a gay pub and had my first lesbian kiss, which was the best kiss I'd ever had at the time and I thought 'Oooh! I like this'!!! Since then I have always had female partners. I didn't necessarily 'come out' to everyone, they all kind of knew because my friends would be there with me when I was out. The only people I didn't tell were my family, because I was too afraid they would disown me or find it offensive. So for years I hid the fact I had girlfriends, and whenever I took girls to my parents house they were always just 'friends' but as I was living away from home in Uni it was easy to hide. I told my brother I was gay in 2009. I had drunk three bottles of wine and felt like the time was right to tell him, but not my parents. So I rung him up. My brother was very supportive and said he loved me no matter what, and I asked him not to tell Mum or Dad, which he agreed to do. Everytime I would go home to see my family I would be on edge just in case I slipped up or said something I shouldn't have in front of them. I think my parents had an inkling but nothing was ever spoken about. I had been in two relationships with women from 2004-2009, but in 2010 I met my current partner Liz. I was already seeing someone at the time, but I knew I wanted to be with Liz. So my ex and myself offered Liz to come and live with us, because she wasn't happy where she was living, sharing with her house mates. As a result I ended up falling for her. So to cut a long story short, I finished with my then girlfriend and started seeing Liz. When we eventually got together I wanted everyone to know I was with her. All my friends and colleagues knew, and as I mentioned earlier, so did my brother. In 2011 my parents invited Liz around for Christmas dinner, because her family

are from North Wales and she would have spent Christmas on her own. So we went to my parent's home where once again she was my 'friend'. Eventually, Liz and I moved in to our own house, just the two of us. My Mum and Dad were ringing up for a chat every other night just to see what I was up to. Mum would always ask 'have you got a boyfriend yet' and I always felt so worried she was going to ask if I had a girlfriend, but she never did. So time went on and I kept mentioning Liz to my parents, and they met her more and more often. It was obvious that we were spending all of our time together, and living together. One day, last November (2013) my parents came up to Cardiff to do some Christmas shopping. So myself and Liz were going to meet them for lunch, which we quite regularly did. After various bottles of wine (always seems to be wine involved in me coming out) we were in the restaurant and I popped to the loo before we were all leaving. When I came back Liz, Mum and Dad were all waiting to go, and Liz whispered to me 'we need to go for a drink NOW, your Mum just asked me about us'. I was confused and worried. I said tarrah to my parents and went in the pub over the road. Liz was shaking and explained to me that when I went to the loo my mum outright asked her 'so when are you marrying Sue then?'. Liz said she jokingly answered 'yeah next year', but Mum said to her 'I'm serious, I know you're together, you're a great team, we love you, Sue is happy, so we're happy'. After I had found this out I rang my parents, who were on the train on the way home to Swansea. Me and Mam were both in tears. She said they'd known for about 6 months, they were fine with it, they loved me, they could see Liz and I were happy so it was all good. Now, it's amazing, I'm not hiding pictures under the bed when they visit our house, we don't have to make a spare bed up and pretend it's Liz's, it's so much more relaxed, I don't have to lie, or watch what I say in case I slip up, it's just brilliant. They've accepted it, they're happy for me and we're all even closer now.

*Sue - Prison Officer -HMP Parc*

## **A MESSAGE FROM TOM**

I have always known that I am bi and I am happy with my sexuality.

I know there are people out there that don't like people like us but it's time they started accepting and respecting our sexuality as it is more common and open nowadays compared to how it was years ago.

We all have the right to be open about our sexuality and get on with our lives the way we are and be happy with it as there is nothing wrong with being LGBT.

I started going to Parc United -the LGBT support group- coz it felt safe to talk about things there. It makes you feel comfortable.

*Tom - prisoner - HMP Parc*

# COMING IN – COMING OUT!

In Parc we have a large prisoner population that is approximately 1500 at any given time. The numbers of openly LGBT prisoners however, does not reflect the same percentage as in society, being far lower. Most men hide their gay status on arrival for fear of being targetted by the other prisoners. This is true in all prisons. What is ironic is that sex between men inside happens probably more frequently than it does on the outside but this is dismissed as 'Jail gay', ie it happens because of necessity - being the only available outlet and not considered gay as such.

Professor Alfred Kinsey researched male sexual orientation and found that men do not just fall into the two polar opposites of gay and straight but that there were many shades of grey in between. As a result of his research he devised the Kinsey Scale which rates 1 as totally heterosexual and 6 as totally homosexual. I assume that all the numbers in between are degrees of bisexuality and that it is these men who find being 'jail gay' relatively easy.

Although, at present, the vast majority of prisoners hide their sexuality on arrival in prison there are some notable exceptions. Prisoners that have come from repressive religious or cultural backgrounds often feel freer to be themselves once behind bars away from the constraints of judgmental eyes. This is particularly true of the traveller community whose culture is actively homophobic. Many of these men fear more what awaits them on release than what is happening inside.

To help these men feel supported we read the book 'Gypsy Boy' by Mikey Walsh as a study along with the Cardiff Gay Man's Reading Group who came into the prison having read it themselves. The book documents Mikey's persecution and eventual escape from the Traveller Community for being gay



albeit he ends up living in a world of isolation and anonymity.

I contacted Mikey Walsh and told him about what we were doing.

First my email to Mikey

*Hi*

*My name's Phil and I work in the prison system. I am gay and one of my many tasks at work (the one I'm probably most passionate about) is tackling homophobia on the wings.*

*I work in Parc in South Wales it is a big prison - 1500 men.*

*I run Gay support groups for prisoners and the number of prisoners attending is growing in size as the men feel safer to come out albeit selectively.*

*One thing that has amazed me is the number of traveller men who join the group. I have 6 at present. Unlike most gay men who when they first come to prison pretend to be straight, many travellers when they come in tell me they are gay and prison is almost a relief. They are free from the pressures of family and can finally be themselves albeit in an incarcerated place.*

*As you well know each one is very concerned that their 'secret' stays safe especially from each other in case it gets back to families.*

*I read your books before I met these guys and although I liked them I thought this is a bit far-fetched surely a dad wouldn't behave like that . However, since I've worked with my travellers I now know this is in fact very common and unfortunately true for all of them.*

*I have given your book to many of them to read and have used it as a book club study. I invited in the Cardiff Gay Man's Reading group who also read it. We discussed your work together. It was very successful.*

*Unfortunately, many of my traveller boys find reading difficult so I am now trying to get it on CD. So they too can listen. In the meantime I get a member of staff to visit them in their cells who reads to them from it.*

*I don't know if you knew this but your book and your story and you yourself are inspirational for these guys. Many of whom are caught between a rock and a hard place and live in fear and denial.*

*It's as if your voice puts their own situation into words.*

*I hope this email finds you well. If ever you wished to visit the prison I would love to show you around although I know you do not like being public. The offer is there if you wanted to talk discreetly to my gay group.*

*Thanks for reading this  
Phil*

## His response

*Hi Phil.*

*I'm so happy to hear from you.*

*It's funny how things like this happen at just the right time. This message from you has made my day.*

*It's sad that I've had to deal with a lot of the 'far fetched' stuff. Not many are very aware of the culture to that extent. But as you'll know.. and many of the guys you work with, it really is a man's world. And being gay in that is a worse fate than death to so many.*

*I DO understand. And I hope with all my heart that the gypsy & traveller men can take comfort that they are not alone.*

*It breaks me to still hear that it is so common amongst our lot. It took a lot of understanding, to know that I was unable to change it for them. And I guess, the sacrifice was having to leave. Doing both me, my family and culture a favour.*

*I would very much like to send each of them my greatest admiration for being able to live as both as best they can. And as long as I'm here, they are not the only ones. Culture can be so fucked up and backwards.*

*I hope you guys enjoy the two books, and are able to find copies of the audiobook. I don't even have one myself to send,*

*sadly, otherwise i would have loved for you to have them. I think they are both on iTunes though, and I read them. Feel free to rob them & copy for your guys.*

*Do keep in touch. And please, send my very best wishes and admiration to them all.*

*It's sad that our race does not accept it. But, we are proof that we CAN successfully live as both. And make the changes we must, to make that work.*

*Much love*

*Mikey*

# ANTHONY'S STORY

I am a traveller and was born in Ireland and I remember as a boy that my family travelled around quite a lot from Tyrone to Sligo, from Sligo to Dublin chasing work and opportunity when and where they could. Like most travellers we had a lot of relatives everywhere. My family came to the UK when I was a young boy so I don't remember all the places we stayed as we still moved from site to site with our caravan. My father never stayed too long in one place- as he didn't like trouble and many of the sites were rough-It was only when we moved to a site in Kent did we actually stay somewhere for some time.

I always knew I was gay- even as a small boy- but I also knew that in the traveller community this was totally not acceptable and was seen as a mental problem. As a result I never spoke to anyone about it for fear that others would get angry as they believed all gay people were bad. I remember being infatuated with my older cousin as a kid and following him around everywhere. I naively thought I loved him- seems funny now.

Being a teenager is a time when all travellers think about getting married. I dreaded it. Marriages are big social events with people coming together from all over the country. My family would travel miles to attend one. Although these are big drinking events there are some strict rules, one being that boys and girls do not meet. It is not allowed! The boys are kept at one end and the girls at the other. There was no pre marital fooling around. However, it was OK for the boys to hang out together. It was at these parties I realised there were other gay traveller lads – a few drinks inside them and defences came down but it was all kept secret and hushed up. No one spoke about it.

As I grew up I had to fight my feelings. I had no one to talk to. I felt very alone, frightened and scared of being disowned. During this time I think I actually hated myself and on two occasions thought about suicide as the only way out.

I eventually did get married and had two wonderful children that I love dearly to this day and although this made me happy on one level I still felt very depressed and guilty deep inside on another. I especially felt sorry for my wife, I kept thinking she deserved more. As a family we lived in the South East for a while but eventually we decided to pack up and come to Wales.

In the evenings I would often leave the family to go drinking sometimes with the other traveller men and sometimes on my own. One night in a pub I met a man and we ended up seeing each other regularly. He was gay and 'out' and obviously not a traveller. He didn't have to hide anything, even his parents knew and supported him. How different from me. Meeting him was like a breath of fresh air. I saw him for a while and saw him as my gay secret – nothing more, but one evening as we sat in his car he told me that he had fallen in love with me and that totally shocked me. I decided to end it there and then as I saw this as yet another problem, caught between him and my wife. My first reaction was to block his number on my phone and finish with him. However, after a week or so I realised how much I had become attached and decided I could not go on. I rang him and our relationship not only continued but also deepened.

This was a difficult time for me as I was torn in two until it came to a point that I had to make a decision. I had reached the turning point and as such I told my wife that I wanted to leave and that I was gay and she deserved a better husband. I begged her to look after the children no matter what. She was devastated and told me she didn't want to stay in the UK any more but wished to go back to Ireland to be with her parents. I'd done it. The unspeakable! News spreads fast through the traveller community and it wasn't long before

my name was dirt. I was disowned and reviled by everyone but especially by my wife's family who still hate my guts and always will.

With my head in a whirl I decided to drive my wife and kids to Ireland, it was an emotional drive because we knew this was the end. Thankfully the children seemed oblivious to it though I knew it was only a matter of time before they heard from someone. When we got to Holyhead I went to buy tickets for the ferry but before I could get out of the car a police car pulled up in front of us. They had a warrant for my arrest and told me I had to go back with them. What? I was not aware I had done anything wrong and was totally shocked. It turned out to be a ridiculous charge for a non payment of a fine- it was less than £200. I immediately offered to pay it there and then but they would not accept it. The ferry was getting ready to leave, I pleaded with them but they insisted that I had to go back with them. I was furious. My wife boarded the ferry alone with the children and that was the last time I saw them.

When I got to court I let my anger be known to the judge who gave me a ten day stretch in Parc. My world felt like it had fallen apart. This was a very low time. When I eventually got released I moved in with my boyfriend. We rented a house next to his parents house in the Rhondda where I got to know them. It couldn't have been more different from my family. My boyfriend and I moved a few times, always in the same area until at last we were able to put a deposit down on a place of our own.

I tried ringing my family several times but they didn't want to know. My father always (and still does) hands the phone to my mum with whom I have a better relationship and refuses to speak to me. Once I rang my older brother, Chris, he said 'Who is this?', I replied 'Anthony', 'Anthony?' He said, 'I don't know anyAnthony', I said 'It's me your brother.' To which he replied 'I dont have a brother called Anthony' and he hung up.

What was so sad was that shortly afterwards the same brother, Chris, passed away and that was the last time I ever spoke to him. I didn't know he had died and preparations for his funeral were taking place back in Kent. Funerals are as big in our community as weddings. He would have been buried without me knowing had not my mother insisted that unless I attended she herself wouldn't go. Her absence would have brought terrible shame to the family. So they had to get in touch and tell me, but the thing was they didn't know where I was living and so first they had to find me. They set out in their cars asking taxi drivers if they knew where a traveller called Anthony was living. After some blind dead ends they eventually found us. We weren't in when they knocked on the door so they went to my partner's parents house instead who told them I was visiting my partner's sister. When they left the parents rang my partner who came rushing round to warn me. Both my partner and the travellers arrived at the same time at Suzie's house. They told me that Chris was dead and I was to come to the funeral. So I decided to go. I had to and anyway I would not have missed it no matter what.

My family and many others were all meeting in a pub near where they lived before catching a train to London. When I walked into the bar nobody spoke to me, I sat alone in the corner until we were ready to go to the station. Throughout the entire journey nobody said a word to me and when we eventually got to the funeral all the adults turned their backs on me. This was hard but what saved the day was that the young people came running up to me and hugged me. It was so welcome. I think the young people today are far more accepting.

Since I have come out there have been several attempts on my life by the traveller community. I have been knifed in the hand (protecting my face), stabbed in the back, bottled over the head and hit by a car but if anything it has made me stronger. I used to think that being gay was wrong and felt ashamed of it but I don't anymore. The biggest reason for this

total change about is probably my partner and his family who have stood by me through it all.

I am now in prison doing time- it's a long story and not to do with travellers. In our new house we had a neighbour who had a bit of a reputation for being a violent man with knives. One day I was in the front of the house having a drink when he walked in and started chatting. I thought it would be a good idea to make friends with him so I offered him a drink. It all went well at first but the drink brought out the worst in him and pretty soon he was shouting abuse at us, calling us gay queers and mocking a photo of my dead brother Chris I had on the mantelpiece, calling him a queer too. I was furious and asked him to leave in no uncertain tones but he refused. What happened after that put me in here.

I've been inside now for fourteen months. When I came into prison I never said either way whether I was gay or not. I don't look camp so could easily pass as straight. Also I have photos of my children on my cell wall, so why would anyone think differently? My partner visits me every week with his sister. My partners's family have been so supportive of me and have accepted me as one of theirs so much so that I see them as my own family now.

The only thing that does bother me in prison are the other travellers. They tend to stick together in here as there is strength in numbers. The prison puts on regular events where my path crosses theirs, such as the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Support group and Sunday Mass. I still hold onto my catholic faith, it means a lot to me.

I'd been in here about a year before my past caught up with me. I was walking back to my wing after having been on a visit and I passed B block. As I did so someone shouted out from one of the cell windows 'Anthony You fucking queer', I couldn't see who it was but everybody in the houseblock must have heard it. I wasn't frightened but more angry than anything that someone had the cowardly cheek to shout something out about my personal life and judge me for it.



They would never say it to my face. I went back to my cell and decided to put on a rainbow wristband I had been given by the Equality Team which I've worn ever since. I'm fed up with having to hide and pretend. Although just a wristband it is a big statement in here. A few people have raised their eyebrows but no regular prisoner has challenged me seriously. I guess I can hold my own on the wing.

However, I have had serious threats made to me from other travellers which has made me watch my back. It is mad that my own kind cause me grief which in itself is so ridiculous. I have even stopped attending the support group and there have been incidents at Mass, but even so I am who I am and I am not going to apologise for it. In this day and age it is so sad that people cannot leave others alone to get on with their lives. I think our culture has a lot to answer for.

*Anthony - prisoner -HMP Parc*

## MY MUM AND BEING GAY

I am gay. Three words I have been fighting with for years. The thought of being gay disgusts me and the thought of my friends and family, especially my mother, knowing scares me. You see I'm from an area where gays are looked down upon, 'Gays fe dead' they say and I have a family that believes that gays will go to hell. I knew I was gay when I was 15 but I had real problems when I was about 19 years old. The emotional battle was difficult- to the point where I actually contemplated suicide several times. But the love for my mother would always stop me every time. You see I love my mum but she is one of the most homophobic people I know. Her religious beliefs hinder her really knowing what her son is really like. I tried telling her once but her religious views got in the way. The conversation went a bit like this.

Mom- 'Son, Mark told me that you are gay.'

Me- 'I told him that I had had gay thoughts before, not that I was gay.'

Mom- 'Having gay thoughts is natural. Every teenager goes through it, but it's a sin if you go through with it. You haven't have you?'

Me- 'No'

Mom- 'Good! Because I will disown you if you did.'

Ouch! That hurt. So because of the love for my mother I prayed every day that God would cure me of this curse however, he never did. I am a religious man with a difference and for years I tried to fight being gay -but failed.

When I came to prison I decided to attend the LGBT support group as I thought it might help me accept my sexuality. Going to the group made me realise that I wasn't alone and many had had to struggle with their acceptance, some had gone through worse things than I did.

Being gay is hard for any young person but it does get easier. My advice to those who are experiencing what I went through is 'what they don't know don't hurt them'.

*Denny - prisoner- HMP Parc*

## LGBT – A VIEW FROM INSIDE

I am a heterosexual man. I went to Parc United because I wanted to learn what it meant to be part of the community and learn acceptance from all. The best thing about the group is that you learn that everyone is equal no matter who they are or what their sexuality is.

Where do I start? Well before now I would have steered well clear of the whole LGBT subject.

I mixed with the 'straight' crowd on the outside and was blinded by all the misconceptions that television, movies etc showed us during the late eighties and nineties. I consider this to be one of my misgivings. I really should have educated myself on what it meant to be LGBT.

So, fast forward two years on and I laugh at the naive person I was. Now the misconceptions have gone and are replaced with the education of acceptance and understanding towards each other and ourselves.

I find this prison, its staff and prisoners some of the most accepting people I have ever met in my 36 years of life. We work, live and strive together regardless of our sexuality and that is down to Parc United and its staff members.

IT IS OK TO BE TRUE TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS.  
YOU WILL BE ACCEPTED.

## **SOLDIERING ON**

When I was 18 years old I joined the Army and even though I could have been discharged for being gay I did not let this stop me having relationships. I used to bring back home to my parent's house my partner who I would have to regard as my 'friend'. It was very difficult and although I desperately wanted to tell my parents that I was gay I just could not do it for fear of how I knew they would react. My teenage brother knew that I was gay and thought that this was extremely cool and was proud of me for being who I was.

When I gave my years notice to leave the Army I bought a small terraced house. This meant that my partner at the time and myself could now have some privacy and even though there was minimal furniture in the house, for our leave period it was a 'safe haven' away from prejudice.

When I left the Army I was not in a relationship and started to move within the gay clubs and met up with my current partner. She also had a house which was in a beautiful valley area. Our relationship grew and she moved in with me. My parents were not happy about this, questioning where she was sleeping because it was a one bedroomed house. I really wanted to tell them about our relationship but again I just couldn't do it. It ate me up inside and caused problems with my partner because she had never hidden that she was gay. When she had been living with me for a couple of months I had a phone call just before I went to work. It was from my Dad and he was very abrupt on the phone questioning why my partner was there and said "is this a lesbian relationship?!" I replied that yes it was and the phone was put down on me. I was upset and I spoke to my brother who said that he had also tried to explain and in a way 'educate' my parents.

My parents and I had intermittent contact for about eight months. This was a difficult period but I wanted them to understand. My parents are both Christian and sent the local priest round to talk to me. Ironically the priest was gay. He personally found this all ridiculous and said that I was who I was and that was the most important thing. I also told my sister and she said "yes I have known for ages....no problem." My brother made a point of spending that Christmas with me and my partner. It was like my parents were embarrassed and that they had done something wrong. After about eight months my brother got us all back talking again and things moved on even though it was very slow.

My partner and I have now being together for twenty years and although it took some time we have been accepted and she is now part of the family. About eight years ago my parents gave us some money because my parents said "We know it is not much but we wanted you to have it because we have paid money towards your sister and brother's weddings". This was a great gesture and seemed to cement the understanding that I was with my partner and this was who I was. I believe that my parents were brought up in an era where being gay was a stigma for the family and the understanding of what being gay meant was never discussed and was seen as an abomination.

*Rachel - officer -HMP Parc*



*Painting by a Parc prisoner 2014*

‘Sometimes I feel vulnerable and exposed because I am gay and an easy target for the bullies. Each day brings something new, it is like a game of snakes and ladders in that you never know what the dice will bring.’

## LIZ'S STORY

I first realised I was gay when in university; I spent my first year doing 'the student thing' – going out getting drunk. I never understood the fascination some of my friends had with men and thought there was something wrong with me. I have always been a bit of a flirt but found that I enjoyed flirting with women more. I went on a date with a girl who ended up being my first girlfriend, we were together for a couple of years but only a few people knew – those we worked with and my sister. Neither of my parents knew even though they had met her, they just knew her as my 'friend'.

A few years passed and then I met a girl who I thought was 'the one', we were on and off for a short while and then we became a couple. I ended up telling my dad that I was a lesbian and in a relationship one night after I had one too many... He was totally fine with it saying he had known for a while and was waiting for me to tell him. The next battle was my mother – she had always said little homophobic type sayings – 'it's Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve' whenever there were gay storylines in TV shows etc. so I was more scared to tell my mum. One day I plucked up the courage (sober too) and just blurted it out. I told her that I was in a relationship with a woman – who I had previously made out was just a friend. My mother's reaction wasn't as bad as I thought it would be but her comment of 'it's your choice' still upset me. As it turned out this relationship ended, badly, and my mother turned out to be very supportive and was there for me helping me through this difficult time.

In 2012 I met my current partner, Kate, it took me some time to introduce her to my mother but when I did my mother loved her as she could see how happy I was. In 2013, Kate was invited to Christmas dinner, which to me showed my mother



totally accepted our relationship. Over the New Year we got engaged and had to break the news to my Nan. For years I was always asked when was I going to settle down and have a boyfriend whenever I saw her, so I was very nervous about this, particularly as she is of an older generation. When it came to it I was too scared to tell her so my mother did instead. All my Nan said was 'why wasn't I told sooner?' The next time I saw my Nan after that she was asking questions about me and Kate and wanted to know when she could meet us together as she could see how happy I was.

*Liz - Probation Officer- HMP Parc*

## FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE

In 1973, the war in Vietnam was still raging, although unbeknown at the time it was in its final stages. The tide had definitely turned against the USA who were daily suffering heavy casualties. One, young, 21 year old american named Russ was determined he was not going to be conscripted into the army and be sent to VietNam to get killed for a lost cause. He had managed to avoid it so far but it seemed increasingly likely to happen as the war dragged on. In desperation he decided to come to the UK to study English so that he could flee to neutral Sweden if he got called up and thus become a draft dodger. I met Russ while he was at college and we fell in love. I was 23. We shared a house together and although it must have seemed obvious to everyone else we thought no one knew we were gay.

That summer the war ended and Russ's relief was obvious, he actually kept laughing for a whole day. Eventually, he naturally wanted to go back to Kentucky where he lived. When the time came for him to leave he asked me to go with him but I said no, in those days no one went to the States and also I was still studying at college. Anyway, I thought to myself 'he will never leave me, he loves me too much' but he did. At the time I was devastated and hurt although now I see it was unreasonable for me to be so. I was once again delighted, half a year later, when Russ announced that he had managed to wangle a grant to come back to the UK to study journalism for three months and that we could move in together again. I was very happy eventhough I knew that it was temporary and he would have to go back again once the grant was spent. I tried not to think about it and took each day as it came. When it arrived, again I naively thought he would not leave but of course he did and this time it was sort of for good.

I stayed in Wales and my life was very happy on one level in that I had lots of friends, I loved the country, I got some animals and a piece of land but I felt like the only gay man in the world as everyone I knew was having kids and they seemed to have purpose in life. I think now I was probably living on top of a mountain to avoid going anywhere where I would have to face being gay. It was a homophobic time and I honestly wished I was straight.

To fit in, I found myself in a relationship with a woman and before I had time to really think she became pregnant. I decided that I was going to do the honourable thing and stay with them both and become the father figure, even though now, with hindsight, I'm not sure who I was being fair to.

Life is rarely clear cut.

All was going well and we were living 'the Good Life' until one day I had a telephone call (pre mobile and computer age) and it was Russ. I remember saying how clear the line was, even more so than it was with several local calls considering he was now living in San Francisco- the gay capital of the world. Imagine my shock when he told me he was in the phone box, just down the road and asked if he could come to visit. (He later said the shock was much greater his end when I told him I had a wife and child.) I could hardly say no. My wife knew about Russ as I had told her but nevertheless, and not surprisingly, she felt uncomfortable about him visiting. Also we were hosting several exchange students from Germany at the time, so when Russ arrived it was quite chaotic.

He stayed for supper but although he was there for several hours there was no opportunity to talk other than pass pleasantries. Cooking dinner, with a 4 year old wrapped round your legs and a full house was pretty full on. It was during the meal Russ delivered his bombshell and told us all that he was HIV positive. This was the 1980s and being HIV positive was a death sentence as it would inevitably end in AIDS. Momentarily everyone was speechless and then started to look worried as the penny dropped... Had I

got HIV? Had my son? Almost reading my mind Russ told us that we need not worry as he knew exactly where he had caught it. He had been living with his current boyfriend, these last two years, who had contracted AIDS and recently died. There was a stunned silence. This was the time when there was an advertising campaign on television warning people about AIDS. It was like a horror movie and very scary. Unfortunately most people in those days saw it as the Gay Plague and morally judged those who were ill and thought that they deserved it. Homophobia was alive and well in the 1980s.

Russ remained in the UK for three days but, out of consideration for our peace of mind, he didn't stay with us. I felt so sorry for him. He told me he was ok at present but needed to avoid people with colds or anything similar, because if he caught it, it could kill him. When the time came for him to return to California we promised to stay in touch by letters, which we did. In fact he wrote very often, each letter not only longer than the one before but becoming more and more needy too.

Eventually a letter arrived that stated the inevitable. Surprisingly, I was still physically shocked eventhough I knew it was going to happen. Russ had developed AIDS and had only another three to four months to live. I knew him well enough to know that this wouldn't be taken stoically and as I read it I could feel his panic. He talked about people he knew who had got it, about his weight loss, about his fears and then at the bottom of the page he wrote

'I have a request. Can I come and stay with you, in Wales, till I die?'

I think I would have said yes had I been alone but I knew this was not fair on my family. My wife was adamant that it wouldn't happen. I wrote a painful reply and told him that I thought it was best for him to stay in California where there was more acceptance and understanding. Wales at the time was not a place to be with AIDS. There were even reports in

the local paper that some staff had said that if a man with AIDS was admitted in the local hospital- they would refuse to treat him.

It was a hard letter to post as I knew he was desperate. Just over a week later I received a reply saying that he totally understood my concerns but as he now only had a maximum of three months left to live, he requested instead if I could go there and look after him. This, however, was equally as difficult for loads of different reason. I could not take that amount of time off work. And also my wife and I job shared so if I went she would not be able to work either and this wasn't even considering the cost of going to California which was immense in those days, as this was before budget airlines. As a result I wrote a second painful reply saying no.

What followed was a long silence which I read as Russ being totally pissed off, but the longer it went on the more I began to think the worst. Four months went by, when eventually a letter arrived from San Francisco. I recognised Russ's hand writing immediately and was relieved. When I opened it there was a letter inside from someone else. It said something like ' I don't know who you are, but I assume Russ knew you. He died on November 28th. I am a 'Buddy' from the AIDS Support Foundation, and when I found him , this envelope with your address on it was lying next to him. I assume he wanted you to know. Write back if you want to find out more. Regards Wayne.'

I was very sad but also glad he had made this parting gesture and not died in silence. I wrote to Wayne who wrote in detail of Russ's struggle to stay alive. It was painful reading and he did not go gracefully. Ironically he died of a kind of flu that only pigeons usually caught but as he had no immune system it eventually killed him. Wayne had tried to help him and was obviously a very special, perceptive person because he ended his letter by saying

'If you want to do something positive then write to his mother. She is an old lady in Kentucky, that travelled to

California to see her son when she found out he was ill, but Russ would not open the door to her. He was in the final throws of life when she arrived and he was not behaving logically. As a result she is very upset and doesn't understand what is going on. Write to her.'

I had never spoken to Russ's mum before but felt compelled to write to say how sorry I was. Unbelievably, this began a ten year correspondance with someone I increasingly grew to like more and more. I never told her that Russ and I had been anything more than friends, though I did sometimes wonder if she guessed. In 1987, she wrote to me of the AIDS Names Quilt project and that she was going to take part. Every person who had died of AIDS in the US so far, had a 6x3 foot quilt made by their loved ones to remember them by. These quilts were laid out in front of the White House. Russ's mum added hers. In the middle of Russ's quilt she had embroidered the welsh flag. I read that as being very special and an acknowledgement to us both.

Looking back, we always seemed to have lots of people staying in our house in those days, and it was on one such chaotic day that the postman delivered a parcel to the door. It was from Ann, Russ's mum. My son thought it was for him as it was his birthday the next day and without thinking started to open it. When he realised his mistake he passed it over and there was a letter on top of some stuff wrapped up. It read 'I am very ill and just wanted you to have these things. They belonged to Russ. If I should pass away then these will be thrown out and that troubles me. Look after them as I know you will' Yours Ann.

Inside was a shirt, some cuff links, a diary, an inscribed pen, a tie and other such things. I found it very hard to look at them as they triggered a lot of pain. I put them rapidly in the wardrobe where they stayed for years. I didn't realise at the time how significant these were to become in my life. I never heard from Ann again.

Three years later in 2001, I went to California for two weeks with my family. We were staying in San Francisco, and one day whilst on my own I decided to find the house where Russ had been living when he died. It was in the busy Castro district, the largest gay community in the world. It was a million miles away from rural Wales in so many ways. As a man in the closet it was very challenging. I eventually, found myself walking down a typical San Fran street with Victorian style bay windowed houses with picket fences, until I got to no 1844. The house was divided into three flats. I knew Russ had lived in the ground floor one as he had said so in his letters. I stood at the gate and stared. I was overwhelmed again and had to wipe my eyes. It was then I noticed someone opening a window and asking 'can I help you?' I left quickly.

It was in 2005 the film *Brokeback Mountain* was breaking box office records. My friend Martin, (totally straight, macho builder type guy) asked me whether I wanted to go to the cinema. I don't think he even knew what was on. As it was a night out I agreed to go. As we watched the story unfold I felt more and more uncomfortable as I realised how much I was identifying with one of the characters – Jack Twist, the married man who secretly was gay. When, in the film, his secret lover Ennis, also married, is murdered. Jack is devastated. In a final gesture he decides to visit Ennis's parents in the country and introduces himself as their son's friend. When they invite him in and show him Ennis's room, Jack has problems keeping it together and becomes emotional. The mother realises there was more to it than them being just friends and asks Jack to take something away with him as a keepsake of Ennis. Jack takes a shirt.

As you can imagine I was by this point in bits. Jack Twist was me. I had Russ's shirt. I was an emotional heap by the end of the film. My mate, Martin said, 'Bloody Hell, it's only a film.' And laughed.

I decided from that point on I had to come out. I did not want to be Jack Twist any more. To make some sort of gesture

to myself I put a tattoo on my arm to remind me that just like this tattoo was there for life so was my decision to come out. There was no going back.

I'm now an openly gay man, living with my boyfriend. It has been a long and difficult journey to get here with many costs attached but I am happy in a deep down way. I finally am myself. I often smile when I think that Russ probably conspired from beyond the grave to get me to come out and I still regularly wear his cuff links with pride, glad that I had met him.

*Adrian - Prison Manager- HMP Parc*



## **DON'T GIVE UP**

I had a poem sent in to me called 'Don't Give Up'. I find it helpful to anyone thinking of wanting to give up in life because of their fear of their sexuality. I have read the poem several times and I have done a drawing to go with it.

The drawing is about the way you are feeling if you haven't come out about your sexuality or you are scared and don't know how to deal with it. It is a man stood there in tears not knowing where to turn and the bars are there expressing there's no way out, or so he feels. This drawing could have different meanings to different people but there will always be a way forward and a way out of the worries and fears you have in your head.



*Mark - prisoner- HMP Parc*

## TRANS IN PRISON

Being transgender isn't as easy as some people think. It's hard living this sort of life, inside or out. Being the way we are is hard in itself, but when everyone is against you it becomes even harder. I've spent at least seven years in various prisons and apart from the one I now currently reside in, I have experienced lots of tactics from other prisoners and staff who in their minds despise people like me and my life as a transgender woman and have made my life difficult.

Before arriving here at Parc, it was like being on a motorway, only stuck in the slow lane, dragging along at a very slow pace, dodging scraps with others around me. It was not the sort of journey you would want to take. But it is your inner strength, self belief and courage that keeps you getting up and carrying on, regardless of what other people think.

In other prisons I often came to blows with men who picked on me. When that happened I never had any support from anyone else, not even others who were bisexual or gay. I think they were frightened that if they supported me they might get picked on in the same way as I was and get bullied. The majority of prisoners felt that gay, bisexual or transgender people were different from themselves. They thought we were sick and as a result you were constantly targeted for being just the way you are. I always think it's not us who are the problem, it is the people who despise and hurt us on a daily basis who have the problem. They need help to understand that we are perfectly normal and mean no one any harm.

Since I arrived at Parc, my life as a woman has been treated very differently to previous establishments that I have been in. There were originally issues but these quickly disappeared. Compared to my last prison this place is more

understanding and as a result I am much more settled in myself. Many of the prisoners accept me for who I am. The ones that don't accept me just leave me alone and that suits me fine. I think that because the staff accept me then the prisoners also do.

Before I came here I did not believe that I would ever be treated the same as the other prisoners because I am a woman trapped in a male body. It was a surprise to be treated exactly the same and staff have given me jobs eventhough I am a woman. The support is across the board be it from the LGBT group, Healthcare or wing officers. Having settled more into my gender, the journey on the motorway is speeding up and I am changing lanes. There are times I feel so relaxed and happy I am actually in the fast lane. It's a lot down to the environment you are living in and the attitudes of those around you.

*Linda - trans prisoner- HMP Parc*

## AN OFFICER'S VIEW

My coming out story is pretty boring as I imagine it is the same as many others. I had it pretty easy with my dad's side of the family as my auntie came out just before I did, so I just said 'I am the same as Tania (my auntie) and that was that.

I took my mother to the pub after seeing there was a competition going on there- to drink a number of pints of Stella lager in order to win a free glass, so I thought get her drunk and then spill the beans, however, as it turned out she ended up telling me that I was gay 😊.

As to my dad, I wrote him a letter and then legged it, soon after that I got a phone call telling me he didn't care and that he loved me.. so all was good.

When I started at Parc my first impression, looking at the gay community was ...'Vultures! They are all part of one big clique'. It seemed as if everyone was in and out of everybody else's lives on so many different levels. They were all entangled together in some way.

I had to step back and think. This was very different to how my own family would react were they to go through split ups etc.

Like that big triangle, for those who have watched the L word, the famous chart on there... yes everyone is linked somehow to everyone else in here.

Maybe it is because the gay community in the prison is rather small, even though we are slowly taking over, that relationships are so cliquey or maybe it's because this job is possibly only suited for strong and slightly mental individuals that so many gay women fit in so well. Anyway, there are a fair few working within this environment now.

The male staff try their best to turn you away from the 'darker side' but otherwise they have been great. I have never

had any negative vibes from them, I think maybe society expects women working in a prison environment to be gay.

On my first day of entering the prison gates, after having been in the classroom with my new trainees for three weeks, I was asked by my trainer. 'so do you fancy men, women or both?' This was said very openly and in front of everyone else, my answer was 'it depends what mood I am in' This same relaxed attitude I have found in every department I have worked in.

As for the prisoners we have the pleasure of looking after, well, you get comments, just like everyone else does. Some people will shout abuse through the window like 'lezza' and 'dyke'... but then a straight women can walk past and they will call them a slag or a tart so I never take anything to heart. I was told the other day by a client. 'leave some women for us will ya' .. news has obviously got out that I had a date on the weekend.'

*Ginny - Prison Officer-HMP Parc*

## KEEPING SECRETS

I am 35 years old, from a traveller background and I am bisexual. It is very difficult being anything other than straight with my upbringing. I have never been open about my sexuality and it is only since I have come to prison that I have told a few people who I have grown to trust. The vast majority of people in here do not know. I don't want them judging me and calling me names. I select who I want to know, Only the LGBT staff know that I like men, none of the others do, I trust them because they are gay. I can talk to them and feel comfortable doing so.

I share a cell and even my cell mate doesn't know I like men. I keep it hidden because I don't want him to judge me or feel threatened by me. There are a couple of other gay prisoners that I've told but that's it. I've learnt to keep things hidden from a very early age. I keep my head down.

Before I came to prison I was not out and have only told a few people since being here. I feel safer in prison- I like it when we are banged up.

*Jason - prisoner-HMP Parc*

## WING SUPPORT

Throughout my life acceptance of my sexuality has changed from having been very intolerant to accepting. My family have always accepted my sexuality but a lot of others around me didn't.

In most prisons in the past it was a reason for name calling and being avoided.

Now, however, due to the changing times and the work of certain individuals such as the Diversity department and the officers, I find it much more acceptable and relaxed. There are those who still discriminate but as a whole many see it as a good thing to have a 'gay' friend in prison and I get along with all age groups, ethnicities, and personalities on the wing where I live who are all supportive and protective of me. It has made being me in prison a lot easier.

I am bisexual and I attend Parc United because I like the feeling of friendship in Parc and it enables me to feel part of the community.

*Ben - prisoner-HMP Parc*



## MY CHANGE

I took the decision to tell everyone I was changing my gender, although most already knew thanks to my ex-wife. The few people I told thought that gender and sexuality were the same thing.

Then the day came and went. WOW!

The first thing that happened was that I lost most of my so called friends but the hardest thing of all was losing my son, followed by my daughter and the grandkids- I had only met Tim when he was eighteen months old. The girls we had raised till the oldest was five.

I then found myself a flat and moved into it. I had very little furniture.

I changed my name by deed poll so it was the same on my driving license and passport.

Then I had to come out to my college friends. The tutors were great and gave me a lot of support.

When my new uniform arrived my face beamed. I looked in the mirror and said 'Yes I should be female.'

I looked lovely in my tunic, with my name on it.

I am now only one step away from reaching my goal which is to have a female body.

Fortunately, my family are now back in my life, in fact we are closer than ever. We are very similar in many ways.. Funnily, I also miss my dog very much and cant wait to cwttch up with her again.

I look forward to the day when I can laugh and enjoy my family being around me. Thank you for reading this, I hope it gives you hope.

A special lady gave me hope, she also helped me empower myself.

So look out for a senior blonde. That's me!

*Mary Ann - transgender prisoner- HMP Parc.*

## A FEW WORDS FROM THE GYM

The PE Department at HMP Parc is committed in eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Our aim is to increase participation levels and make Sport available to all prisoners at Parc, irrespective of age, disability, race or sexual orientation. Over the past few months several high profile sporting stars have openly admitted they are gay for example Tom Daley and Gareth Thomas. The PE Department were approached by Phil Forder about the possibility of teams from HMP Parc playing football and rugby matches against openly gay local clubs. One of the key successes has been getting the Gym orderly team actively involved in breaking down stereotyping of Gay individuals. This particular prisoner group are respected and held in high esteem by other prisoners. The fact this particular group have been positive and have interacted/engaged has played a big part which has filtered down to other prisoner groups, that being Gay is normal. The orderly team are keen to set up a peer support group for Gay prisoners who wish to access the Gym. Phil with his enthusiastic and committed approach has played a huge part in setting up a dedicated LGBT football team at Parc. There are number of players in the squad who openly admit they would not attend any kind of PE session under normal circumstances but feel safe and able to be open in such an environment where they are able to appreciate the benefits of participating in Sport. Parc is the first prison in the world to put together an openly gay football team. Sport especially football has proven to be an excellent way of breaking down barriers and promoting an inclusive environment for all.

*Matt - Gym Manager- HMP Parc*



## **DRAG KING**

One break time, over a cup of coffee, I managed to interview one of our teachers, Stevie about being a lesbian in a prison environment.

“It’s crazy trying to hide it as I look so much like a man, throughout my life I’ve always been mistaken for a boy, so why pretend? A very funny story that illustrates the point happened a few years ago, when there was a talent competition to be held at a well-known gay pub in Cardiff. It was called Drag Idol and was a regional heat for a national competition. All the entrants were men dressed up as women, so to try and redress the balance I decided to enter as a ‘Drag King’, ie a woman dressed up as a man. I got myself a suit, a shirt and tie but when I put them on and stood in front of the mirror I didn’t look that different to my normal, everyday self. So to be in with a chance, I decided to dress as a woman with exaggerated make-up, blonde wig, stiletto boots, sequins - the works. I must admit I looked more like a man in drag than some of the other entries, even though I am a woman.

I was billed as ‘Annie Vacancies’ and my performance consisted of a series of god-awful jokes and a vocal rendition of Shania Twain’s, ‘Man! I feel like a woman’. It was all done tongue in cheek and was a bit of a laugh and a good night out, so imagine my surprise when I actually won and went through to the next stage.

The National Finals were held in London at the well-known Black Cap club- a famous drag club that launched the careers of Lily Savage, Julian Clary and many others besides. I didn’t win but it was a great experience and I’m not sure to this day

that the audience or the judges realised that I was actually a real woman. Annie's career was short-lived as she then retired although she has come out for the occasional charity event.

*Stevie - Teacher-HMP Parc*

## **MY SEX**

I was born gay. I knew I was gay ever since I could remember. I was always drawn to men. There was just something about men I was attracted to. I always used to think about men. I realised that I was different to a lot of people. So I thought, that is, until I got a little bit older, then I realised that I wasn't that different. There are lots of gay men and women. When I first knew I was gay I didn't tell anyone because I was very worried what would my family think, my friends, what if they didn't accept it. What would I do? Who shall I tell first? All these things were going through my head and at this time I was still quite young. I was hoping that this was just a stage I was going through. I was hoping it wouldn't last long and then at the age of ten I went with a girl for the first time. Her name was Shania, she was thirteen. It didn't work so then I knew I was gay and found it very hard to come to terms with. I was gay even though I was still finding out what gay was. When I eventually went with a boy, then I knew I was a hundred percent gay and I didn't know what to do. I couldn't handle it. Would my friends and family accept me? I didn't know what to do. I found it very difficult and my behaviour went really bad. I started to cut myself all over my body. I even tried to kill myself loads of times by taking overdoses. I didn't know what to do until my behaviour got really, really bad and I became very hard to control until my mum made the best decision of my life. Her decision was to send me out of the country from Swansea which was home to go 250 miles away to a beautiful country called Cornwall. I was in a little town called Redruth in a boarding school called Pednandrea. It was a really big black and white house set in its own grounds at the top of a big hill. It had a really nice garden, a lovely pond, a pool room and garage. It was amazing. I

lived there with seven other boys. So there were eight of us all together and there were lovely staff and teachers there and living with all these boys, I knew I was gay. I didn't tell any of the boys or any of the staff and one year I met a girl called Charlene, a proper Cornish girl. She became my best friend and we talked about everything and we never hid anything from each other. We told each other everything. One day I plucked up the courage to tell someone and that person was Charlene. So I phoned her up and asked her to meet me at the bottom of my drive at 2pm. So we met up and I gave her a cuddle and the first words that I told her were that I was gay. She looked at me like she never had looked at me before. She was shocked. She didn't know what to say or do. I was waiting for a response. She looked me in the eyes and gave me the biggest cuddle ever. She said, you're my best friend no matter what and I love you and when I told her it felt like a big weight had been taken off my shoulders. It was such a release that some one knew and still loved me for who I was. I was someone different from that day. I didn't know what it was but I felt great that I told someone. Once I had told her I became so happy that it was out. I had a lot more confidence. It was the best feeling ever. It was the best thing I have done. I should have talked to someone sooner. I stopped self-harming and stopped suicide attempts. You should never keep it bottled up. It is who you are. You didn't choose to be that way. You was made to be that way. It isn't wrong. You got the same rights as anyone else. Be proud of who you are. Hold your head high. Be proud of who you are. You don't have to suffer alone. There are lots of people that will accept who you are. The worst thing to do is to keep it to yourself. Be happy and free to live your life. Everyone is equal. We're all the same as anyone else apart from that we're attracted to the same sex.

*Lee - prisoner-HMP Parc*

## CELL RELATIONSHIP

Being gay in prison is difficult. I have spent a lot of my adult life inside and although I am gay I never told anyone. As a result I have felt very lonely and alone. Other prisoners would crack jokes and say bad things about gay men and I would just have to listen. It used to get to me. I just wanted to get up on the roof and shout it out but of course I didn't because I was scared.

I am not the sort of guy that you would look at and say 'he's gay' as I look like everyone else- a bit rough like- and I have a reputation for being quite hard. But inside it is a different story.

One day I was working in the servery, dishing out the food, when another prisoner said to me

'Come on admit it! I know you're gay.' He was sort of messing about but I had had enough and snapped.

'Yea! So what? What you gonna do about it?'

He replied 'No, it's cool with me, I'm still your mate.'

But, pretty soon everyone on the wing was talking about it.

During break this other guy came up to me and asked me directly, he called me 'loverboy'. I went sorta nuts and said

'Are you taking the piss?' He backed off and after that no one dared confront me though I'm sure they all knew. This made me feel very uncomfortable because if I started talking to anyone I was afraid that they would think that I was coming on to them and make me feel a fool.

Eventually, I got two-ed up with another guy and we started a relationship. We thought no-one knew but on a wing it's hard to keep things private for long. I was really shocked when my personal officer asked me if I needed condoms and that I just had to ask. I was embarrassed. Also other prisoners started asking

'Are you two gay?' I'd always deny it though it was, I guess, common knowledge.

We were in a relationship for eighteen months. Then my pad mate got moved to another wing. I was upset as I cared for him. It was hard for us to stay in contact and then I got released.

I wrote to him regularly and got two letters back before I got recalled and came back to prison. I was looking forward to seeing him again. We were not on the same wing however and it wasn't long before he was released. After that I never saw him again.

*Daniel - prisoner-HMP Parc*



## NOT NEEDING TO COME OUT

I knew I was gay when I was around 12.

I never came out to my parents. They just knew.

I didn't tell them because I was embarrassed and thought they would be disappointed in me and I thought that things would change.

I told my siblings – they knew before I even told them. They just knew.

I've never spoken about my sexuality to my dad, he accepts my partner along with my mum, my family and my extended family. My nan doesn't know. She doesn't get it all and I swear she's still in the stone ages when it comes to her views! But that's just her, she calls my partner my friend – I'm fine with that. I'm sure deep down she knows but I would never tell her.

I have worked in HMP Parc a number of years – staff who know me know I am gay. I have NEVER had any issues over it. To be honest nobody has really questioned it. Everybody in work accepts me for who I am.

I don't generally talk about my sexuality and most people wouldn't even know I was gay. I don't like to make an issue out of it as it doesn't really matter – most of my friends are straight and we are no different.

*Alison - Staff-HMP Parc*