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The Cross in My Closet

Ann M. Sasala
Gettysburg College

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The Cross in My Closet

Abstract

All this changed when I turned fourteen. Suddenly the quiet peace was shattered by my raucous, rebellious response to the “Adam and Eve Not Ann and Eve” chanted by my neighbors, teachers, and family. The solace I once felt during prayer became a black hole of hate; instead of listening for words of kindness, instead of finding serenity, I spit in the faces of my family, friends, and religion. Hoping to purge my body of its new found, fiery anger, I turned to a priest who told me there could be no salvation: “man shall not lie with man... it is an abomination”. The calming repetitions of Hail Marys and Glory Bes mixed with the damning words of my priest; I slammed the door on what was once an important part of my life. After all, when “God Hates Fags”, isn’t that what I was supposed to do. Set my cross on fire, wall it up in my closet, and forget it ever existed. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, Religion, Gender & Sexuality, Catholic faith, Queer

Disciplines

Catholic Studies | Ethics in Religion | Gender and Sexuality | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies | Religion

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://www.gettysburg.edu/) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

THE CROSS IN MY CLOSET

February 16, 2015

It is no secret that my family is Catholic. The slow pace of my childhood beat out a quiet rhythm of whispered rosaries, genuflect here, cross yourself there, amen. My paternal grandparents stood for years as the pillars of faith: strong; silent; loving; never pushing me to be who I was not.



All this changed when I turned fourteen. Suddenly the quiet peace was shattered by my raucous, rebellious response to the “Adam and Eve Not Ann and Eve” chanted by my neighbors, teachers, and family. The solace I once felt during prayer became a black hole of hate; instead of listening for words of kindness, instead of finding serenity, I spit in the faces of my family, friends, and religion. Hoping to purge my body of its new found, fiery anger, I turned to a priest who told me there could be no salvation: “man shall not lie with man...it is an abomination”. The calming repetitions of Hail Marys and Glory Bes mixed with the damning words of my priest; I slammed the door on what was once an important part of my life. After all, when “God Hates Fags”, isn’t that what I was supposed to do. Set my cross on fire, wall it up in my closet, and forget it ever existed.

For seven years I lied to myself, pretended to be an atheist, ignored an important part of who I am in order to negotiate another. But my cross was not the only thing hiding in my closet, so were my clothes, my memories. Just as I can clothe myself in an “I don’t give a fuck” leather jacket or a “looking great, feeling great” tie, I can clasp a “chaste, centering, contentious” cross around my neck.

When my grandfather passed away, I asked for his sweaters —the thick wool ones he took a lifetime to collect— a physical reminder I could wear to feel his arms around me one last time. As I write this, I am wrapped in the warm security of his clothing —now mine—, the remnants of his faithful masculinity.

When my grandmother passed away, I asked for her cross —the demure silver one on a matching chain— a physical reminder I could wear to feel her inspire me one last time. As I write this, I am staring at her cross the same way I have stared at it since September, unable to wear the memory of her faith-laced femininity. This cross is tied up in a femininity that I never have, never will, and never could

embody. Taking up this cross would mean becoming someone I am not meant to be. In struggling with this cross, I have been forced to confront so many things: how I understand myself; how I understand my faith; and how the world portrays them both.

It's rare for there to be a productive conversation surrounding being queer and being a person of faith. The two tend to be viewed as opposing fighters in an everlasting cage match; overtime they meet, fans fill the arena with hate-mongering, mistaken beliefs, and miscommunicated sentiments. "You're going to hell!" screams one side, attempting to drown out the same cheer emanating from the other. Lost in this sea of hate, I joined in, added to the problem, screamed.

But now, I am stepping back from the fight: deafened, shocked, but firm in my values. Into this madness, I pledge to add an understanding voice. One that knows when to be silent so that I may listen. One that knows when to speak so that my prayer may be heard. I pray that I and others continue to find the strength to reconcile two pieces of ourselves in conflict only because the world says they should be; that we open people's eyes to the injustice perpetrated by a system who cannot accept our comfort with who we are; that we may be out, proud, queer, and faithful.

Ann Sasala '15
Contributing Writer