

**Wise Words from *Coming Out Women*:**  
**“When I Came Out....” \* Handout #5 \* 4/6/11**

“When I Came Out....”

- “My family said, ‘We won’t mention it to anyone—no need to since you aren’t in a relationship with anyone’.”

*We are lesbians whether we are (or ever have been) in relationship with another woman—same as for heterosexuals. Psychologists have determined that sexual orientation may be developed by as early as age 3. So we each have a sexual orientation long before we ever start dating anyone of either gender.*

“When I Came Out....”

- “My aunts (who were raising me) said, ‘It has to be a phase.’”

*It isn’t a phase any more than being heterosexual “is a phase.” Since virtually every person is socialized to be heterosexual, it simply (understandably) takes most non-heterosexuals quite a while to recognize, acknowledge, and accept that we CAN celebrate this identity. Note: Some psychologists do recognize that sexual orientation and identity can be “fluid” based on life circumstances.*

“When I Came Out....”

- “My mother said she didn’t want any of her friends to find out. She said, ‘You’ve got what you want now—you’ve got a girlfriend--so now be quiet about it!’.”

*Part of our validation as lesbians is having other people accept—and celebrate--ALL of who we are, not insist on our hiding PART of who we are. Parents who see “being gay” as a “terrible thing” may blame themselves for causing our gayness by their “doing something wrong.” Tell them about PFLAG. Go with them to a first Thursday meeting (PFLAG.org + Tacoma).*

“When I Came Out....”

- Well...I just didn’t! I married a man instead—so I wouldn’t have to be gay. *Many gays and lesbians do try to conform to the societal norm to fit into the heterosexual box. They may believe that if they “resist homosexual urges and situations,” they will be changed to hetero—especially if they pray and do “reparative therapy.” However, organizations such as the APAs (American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association) state that there is no evidence-based research that prove that such conversion (or reparative) therapy does actually change sexual orientation. “Former gays” may have altered their sexual behavior—but not their sexual orientation.*

“When I Came Out....”

- One family member said that if I was born like that (lesbian), I could just overcome it.

*This is unrealistic. We don’t expect heterosexuals to change their sexual orientation or African Americans to lighten the color of their skin, or require very short adults to grow ten inches. Nor should minorities change! Without diversity, life would be boring. And individual rights must be respected!*

“When I Came Out...”

- My brother asked me why I’d ever come out when I would become the target of so much hatred and jokes, potential job loss, lesbian custody cases....

*Yes, many people do have serious problems accepting and affirming LBGT people. However, living life authentically (being truly who we are) is priceless.*

“When I Came Out...”

- I felt like a liar because I didn’t tell everyone. My best friend (who is “straight”) told me later that I had “hurt her terribly because I kept this a secret from her.”

*No need to come out to everybody right now (or necessarily ever). Instead:*

- \* *Wait until you know more about who you are regarding your sexual orientation and until you feel good about you. It takes time to unravel “internalized homophobia.” But do invest time in the process.*
- \* *Don’t come out until you have a good support network. You can develop this by spending time with other lesbians: at Coming Out Women or with Tacoma Lesbian Concern (TLC), Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC), South Sound Lesbians Meetups, by good therapy and reading.*
- \* *Come out selectively, possibly one person or group at a time. Make a list of pro’s and con’s about coming out to this person or group. Weigh the most likely (or worst possible) consequences against the benefits.*
- \* *Ask your friend to imagine living life as a lesbian for 48 hours and experience the stressors. Fears about losing a close friendship (or family or job) can keep someone “closeted” for years--or forever. Keep in mind that it may take some time for friends/family to understand and accept us (just as it takes ourselves time for those processes).*

“When I Came Out...”

- I CELEBRATED!!! I lived my first 50 years for my parents, my husband, my neighbors, my kids, my church. The NEXT 50 years are MINE! *Hallelujah!!!*

**Contrast your own coming out experiences by completing the table.**

	My best experience....	My worst experience....
Was coming out to (name the person):		
Happened when I was (age?)		
The way I came out to that person was: (or was I “outed”?)		
The response that the person made was:		
Factors that probably made this the best (or worst) coming out experience were:		