

# **BUGGIN' OUT!**

## **Newsletter**

Applying Biblical Truth and Humor to the Struggle.

### To the Friends of Matthew Sheppard

My name is Robert. I am writing to convey my deepest remorse at the tragedy that took Matthew away from you and, unfairly, made his last hours upon this earth very painful and confusing ones.

Although I never had the privilege of meeting Matthew in person, I share in your grief as Matthew and I, although separated by thousands of miles, walked very similar paths in life. You see, I struggled with homosexuality for over 28 years. And I, just like Matthew, was basically a *good guy who just preferred men*.

Over the next few months, you will be unfairly subjected to reliving this tragedy over and over again as the media, Congress, politicians, gay activist groups and court proceedings continually nourish its publicity. This will certainly prolong your grieving, raise many questions inside you and postpone the closure for which you must surely long. I wish I were able to say something new to comfort you or, at least, try to help you find a satisfactory answer as to why this heinous crime transpired. I cannot.

I do, however, want to share with you a perspective you will not hear in the media. I want to bring you inside Matthew's heart so you will be able to see the night of Tuesday, October 15, 1998 from his eyes.

As a man who walked the homosexual path for most of my life, I understand how a sweet, considerate, intelligent and loving man as Matthew must have felt that fateful evening. There is no doubt in my mind, Matthew wanted to be loved. He didn't want sex. He wasn't looking for trouble and he certainly wasn't seeing how risky he could get. No. Matthew, just like most homosexually-inclined men, just wanted to feel loved.

Now, this is where those who do not struggle with homosexuality seem to lose their grasp of understanding. Matthew may indeed have been loved. I'm sure each and every one of you, his dear friends, loved him abundantly and would have gone to the ends of the Earth for him. But, even though he may have had love, he craved a specific love. He had a void in him that he felt only the love of another man could fill (and it had to be from a man who fit Matthew's stereotype of what a man should be).

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This need, this craving, for masculine contact can become so fierce and burn so feverishly inside the homosexual, that common sense, moral bases and good judgement are often quelled in order to satisfy it.

Consider this. You most likely have access to food all day long. Your kitchens are well stocked and restaurants abound. Assume, for a moment, that all this was suddenly denied to you. Should your hunger grow strong enough, you might rummage through garbage cans or scavenge for edibles that would disgust others. You might even resort to stealing food, despite any Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim or other religious base you practice.

This is what I believe was going through Matthew's mind the night he decided to get into a pickup truck with Russell Henderson and Aaron Mc Kinney. Yes, it was dangerous to leave with strange men. No, it may not have been something he normally would have done. Maybe he even fought with himself prior to leaving with them. But, since his need for male love was so strong and no other source was readily available, he was forced-yes, forced-to seek out this love he so desperately craved in a risky and illegitimate manner.

There is no doubt in my mind that Russell Henderson and Aaron Mc Kinney sensed Matthew's weakness. Also, they likely saw his need and played on it by praising him, giving him approval and offering pats on the back and promises of tender intimacy. Under such circumstances, before I got the help I needed to recover from homosexual addictions, I would not have stood a chance against such promises. Tragically, I doubt Matthew did either. Matthew lost his common sense and his ability to distinguish safe from unsafe because his need to be loved was stronger than both these.

I used to do everything Matthew did and I understand why he did it. My heart bleeds for him more than my words could ever express to you. I loved Matthew because I knew the Matthew many of you did not. I knew the Matthew who shared the pain, the desperation and the frustration of untreated homosexuality.

I share your grief. Hate crimes are inexcusable, as are all murders and all assaults. You grieve at

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the tremendous loss you have to endure. I grieve because Matthew's death could have been prevented, had the right people been able to reach him sooner.

You see, I too went home with strange men, cruised around New York City until four in the morning looking for love and entered into many dangerous situations, all in the name of finding the male contact I so avidly hungered for. In fact, I feel an overwhelming guilt that it was Matthew whose life ended prematurely and not mine. It just seems unfair that I am alive today and Matthew is not when we took the same chances.

One night as I was cruising around Manhattan, I tuned into a Christian radio show about overcoming homosexuality. Reluctantly, I sent away for some tapes and literature. After a lot of hard work, some backsliding and through the love of some great people, I did gain control over my homosexuality. Those gay addictions and cravings are no longer a dominating part of me. It didn't happen overnight, but it did indeed happen.

I don't wish to take up any more of your time or keep you dwelling on this awful pain. I do ask that in the upcoming months, when you hear about those *right-wing Christian groups who promote hate crimes* such as Exodus International and Focus on the Family, you remember me.

You see, I may not be your Matthew, but I am a man Matthew would have understood. I only wish that I could have had the opportunity to tell him about the wonderful changes in my life thanks to these two organizations. I would have shared with Matthew all the pain, confusion and prejudice that used to be a way of life for me. I would have told him all about the hundreds of men I had sex with and about my loneliness. Yes, we could have talked for weeks about loneliness. Every homosexually-inclined man can relate to loneliness.

I would have held his hand, looked into his young eyes and told him the truth....*Matthew, you **can** satisfy that hunger for a man in safe, legitimate ways. There really **is** a way out of homosexuality and I want to help take you there if you will let me. I want to help you gain control over your feelings so you will make safe, mature decisions about what you do, where you go and with whom you do it. I want to be your friend.*

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I don't know what Matthew's response to me would have been. But no matter what his answer was to be, at least he would have had a friend who understood. And maybe having an extra phone number to call on the night he went looking for love at Fireside Lounge, a number of someone who had already beaten the battle he was currently fighting, he might have chosen a different option. He may have chosen to **not** get into the pickup truck with Russell Henderson and Aaron Mc Kinney.

I ask you to please keep my story in mind. Focus on the Family and Exodus International are being unjustly blamed for this tragedy. They are, for the most part, just spreading the word that everyone has the inalienable right to live a life of the highest quality and safety. I am living proof that the homosexual can change. This does not mean that I am anti-gay or homophobic. Just that I am pro-choice. Many men and women are miserable living with homosexuality. Focus on the Family and Exodus International believe that these men and women deserve the same chance to be happy as those who are content with homosexuality.

I can assure you that had I not accidentally tuned into Christian radio one night and heard about the possibility of change, I would still be driving around the city all night looking to satisfy my hunger for male love. If it had not been for such caring people, I doubt I would be alive today to write you this letter.

I wish once more to express my outrage at what happened to Matthew. You are, and will continue to be, in my prayers. May the Lord help to comfort you through this painful time in your lives.

Robert L.

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