

PETER GAJDICS

Crossing Styx

500-WORD MEMOIR

WINNER

ESTIMATED READING TIME: 2:32

When I was six years old, a fat, balding man with a bloated, purplish nose molested me in my elementary-school toilet. No one knew about the molestation, or my shame; and even later, when the night terrors began, even then my parents did not know, or want to know, what had happened to their baby boy.

Stalking my every move, as I moved into puberty, was the fear that my growing attraction for men had been created, and not by God—that my sexuality was like a descending staircase I'd been edged down, one step at a time, into the cellar of my homosexuality. Now I was trapped inside that prison, fearful that what had been done to me as a child, I would do unto others as an adult.

After I came out and was rejected by my family, I started therapy with a psychiatrist who told me that I could, with his guidance, unlearn my homosexuality and revert to my innate heterosexuality. He might as well have said that we could prevent me from becoming like the fat man in my elementary-school toilet: a dirty old man, preying on innocent children. His words were a lifeline, thrown out to me at sea.

Medication, used initially to combat insomnia, became his weapon against my sex drive. Four years of primal therapy, coupled with lethal doses of antidepressants, brought me to one icy winter morning when I stood

from my bed and collapsed, feeling the air rush past me as if I'd been plunged down an endless elevator shaft.

For months my body was an earthquake I was trapped inside, but it became clear as I recovered that no amount of therapy, or medication, could extinguish my attraction for men. And so my psychiatrist ordered me to bottle and sniff my own feces every time I saw a man I found attractive. "You need to be reminded where homosexual men stick their penis," he said. "You need to be reminded that homosexual relations are not pleasurable."

If the tiny bottle did anything, it reminded me of how often I still thought of men. Now I'd reach into my shoulder pack, pull out the container, discreetly hold it up under my nose, open it and take a deep, dizzying whiff, like I was snorting poppers in a bathhouse.

Two more years of so-called therapy elapsed before I'd stand naked before my bedroom mirror, staring at my pale and bloated body from years of overmedication, and into my thirty-year-old eyes: dark, sunken, unhappy. There was no heterosexual in me waiting to emerge; instead, I became like a shell with its innards scooped out.

The choice, in the end, was never about being gay or straight. The choice was accept myself or die: to live or die.

Peter has had essays published in *Gay Times*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, and *The Gajdics Printed Blog*. His first book, *Crossing Styx: A Memoir of Survival*, is currently under consideration for publication. Peter lives in Vancouver, Canada, is a contributing writer at www.thenervousbreakdown.com, and can be contacted at gajdics@hotmail.com.