

“Welcoming The Stranger”

By David Paul

We may all seek to see ourselves
As unique in some way as we follow
Our own different drummer,
But I am here to share with you
That some really struggle with the label
Of being different!
How does one explain the journey
One undertakes in accepting
Themselves as different?
To know that try as you might
You may never completely fit in.
After all of effort
You may want to give up trying
So hard to fit in
In order to be accepted.
Some can't handle
This painful separation that may lead
Some to depression,
While others may choose

To leave this life
Rather than suffering the bullying any more.
Other may choose to stay
And learn
To find some acceptance with other
Kindred spirits.
For me, it has been a process
Of welcoming the stranger,
The hidden self that is more
Than just slurs of misunderstandings
The popular kids throw at you.
I spent allot of time alone
Growing up
With few friends to talk to
In a small town in the
Iowa cornfields.
It was an unexpected & joyful awakening
When I was asked to be the host
High school stage manager
For a touring company
Of Neil Simon's "The Odd Couple".
Each night I was to set the stage

To be ready for the next performance.
During my preparation of the stage,
I first laid my eyes
On a gay national newspaper
Called "The Advocate".
At that time it had a pink personal section
For others seeking a connection and
Affirmation of who they are.
That infamous pink section of The Advocate
Was my first hard evidence
That I was not alone.
"The Advocate"
Was not the kind of paper
You would find at our local
Drug store but it comforted me
That I was not the only one
Out there trying to give birth
To a new life within me.
Being young and earnest,
I decided I needed to try
To reach out to others
By placing my own ad

In this newly discovered paper!
Afraid of the questions
That maybe asked by opening
My own P.O. Box,
I listed my parents address
My plan was to leave school shorty in the morning
In order to try to catch the mail
Before my mom
Picked it up from the outside mailbox.
The plan did not work completely
Since sometimes I missed beating her
To the mailbox.
My parents confronted me
With a stack of letters
From other desperate men
Trying to make connections
By mail.
To ensure that this was only
“A phase” I was going through,
Every two weeks my dad & I
Would drive a hour & a half
To the state hospital

To meet with a psychiatrist
Who endeavored to
“Straighten” me out.
As a budding actor,
I took on the challenge
To “play the part”
Of being
Attracted to the opposite sex
After that misadventure,
I knew that any further exploration
Would have to wait
Till I could move across the state
To the safety of a large University.
I still had many questions
About this new community I had
Yet to experience,
But at least I knew
I was not alone and
There is safety in numbers
In being in larger city where there
Was more possibilities and
Public meeting places.

Welcoming the stranger is not
A one-time event but
A journey of self-discovery that last
A life time.
One book can't lay out all the subtle
Twist and turns.
This was especially true for me
When I tried to
Convince by seminary spiritual director
That maybe I was
Bi-sexual.
I was told this was not an option,
A priest should be celibate,
Which meant non-sexual.
So I was told,
But not as I experienced
Living in the seminary or
Meeting new priests.
Each had a story of how
They interpreted being
Celibate for themselves.
Finally after being asked

To leave the seminary,
I was able to begin to
Come out and
Find my true self.

The Stranger began to slowly
Emerge from the shadows
Of suppression & self-doubt,
Desperate to live in the light
And to be accepted
As part of my complete self.

No longer afraid
Of being a lonely freak of nature,
Cast out from society to live
Alone...

I began to welcome my stranger
As a gift to help me integrate
Parts of myself.

I found that when
I could combine
These parts of myself
I could lead a more
Complete life of acceptance & liberation.

Maybe aspects of
My coming out story may
Sound unique to some,
But for others
I hope it
It may be like a “de ja vu” experience
That resonates with a kindred spirit.
For in fact there is more
That unites us in common experience
Than that
Which endeavors to separate us.
Together we are a community
And strong.
It is my hope
That by sharing my story
Someday soon you too will begin the journey
To welcome the stranger within you.