

When  
Gay Men

Happen  
to

Straight  
Women



After New Jersey governor James McGreevey publicly admitted his  
And when did she know it? Is their marriage over or salvageable? For  
answers aren't as straight and narrow as one might think. AIMEE LEE BALL

When the love of your life tells you he has finally found happiness—with another man—what does that do to your marriage? Your family? Your sanity?



homosexuality earlier this year, most people wondered: What, if anything, did his wife know? the estimated two million Americans who are or have been married to gay spouses, the finds out what happens when the bomb drops. PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BETH YARNELLE EDWARDS

A

ARRANGING A MEETING in a public place between two people who've never met requires a brief moment of self-description.

When I make a plan to meet Sandy Smith\* at a Starbucks in San Francisco, she reveals that she is 32 years old, 5'7", and 100 pounds.

"Is that stress skinniness?" I venture.

She answers with a bitter little chuckle. "We call it the gay diet," she says.

Smith is one of an estimated two million people who reacted with painful empathy to last summer's press conference when Governor James McGreevey of New Jersey announced that he is homosexual, his wife standing beside him with what almost any observer would describe as a frozen smile of support on her face. Some of those millions no doubt accepted a partner's homosexuality in the original marital bargain for reasons best known to themselves (companionship, financial support, or Rock Hudson charm). But far more commonly, a hidden identity has been revealed, exposed, or detected.

"With the discovery of the partner's sexual orientation, the spousal role may seem like a charade and the marriage a sham," says Amity Pierce Buxton, PhD, who is familiar with the subject both personally and professionally: After learning that her own husband was gay, she wrote *The Other Side of the Closet: The Coming-Out Crisis for Straight Spouses and Families*, and founded the Straight Spouse Network, an international support organization. "You go into a kind of catatonic state—either crying all the time or smiling like a goof. Secrecy is the big issue, and not just because of the health implications: The intimate core of this man has been hidden from you. And family secrets are toxic." Reaction from family, friends, and society often includes the same incredulity Ted Koppel showed, shortly after the McGreevey press conference, when his *Nightline* guest was Arianna Huffington, whose ex-husband (a straitlaced pillar of the right wing) came out of the closet in 1998. *How could a person not know?* was Koppel's version of the more prurient question: *Wasn't the sex really bad?*

\*Name and identifying details have been changed.

In fact, women married to gay men describe every possible permutation of a sex life: Some enjoyed physical intimacy for years, others always felt that something was missing, and some were accused of being oversexed, undersexed, or frigid (the latter as a kind of "put the blame on Mame" tactic). They may have spent years trying to engender a response, to be prettier, thinner, blonder, more experimental or initiating. Rather than erasing a woman's doubts about herself, the discovery of the hidden reason for sexual problems in a marriage often seems like a confirmation of her own fears about herself, according to Buxton. "But the fundamental problem is that straight spouses are the wrong sex for their gay partners."

The eventual disclosure of a man's true sexual nature may be the result of soul-searching and his wish to live authentically, or the threat of public exposure (like McGreevey), or something much more ominous, like an arrest or an HIV diagnosis. Often the truth comes with an admission of clandestine gay sex—quick, anonymous, uncomplicated. (Such encounters in men's restrooms used to be known as the "tearoom trade.") For many men, this furtive behavior is the first step

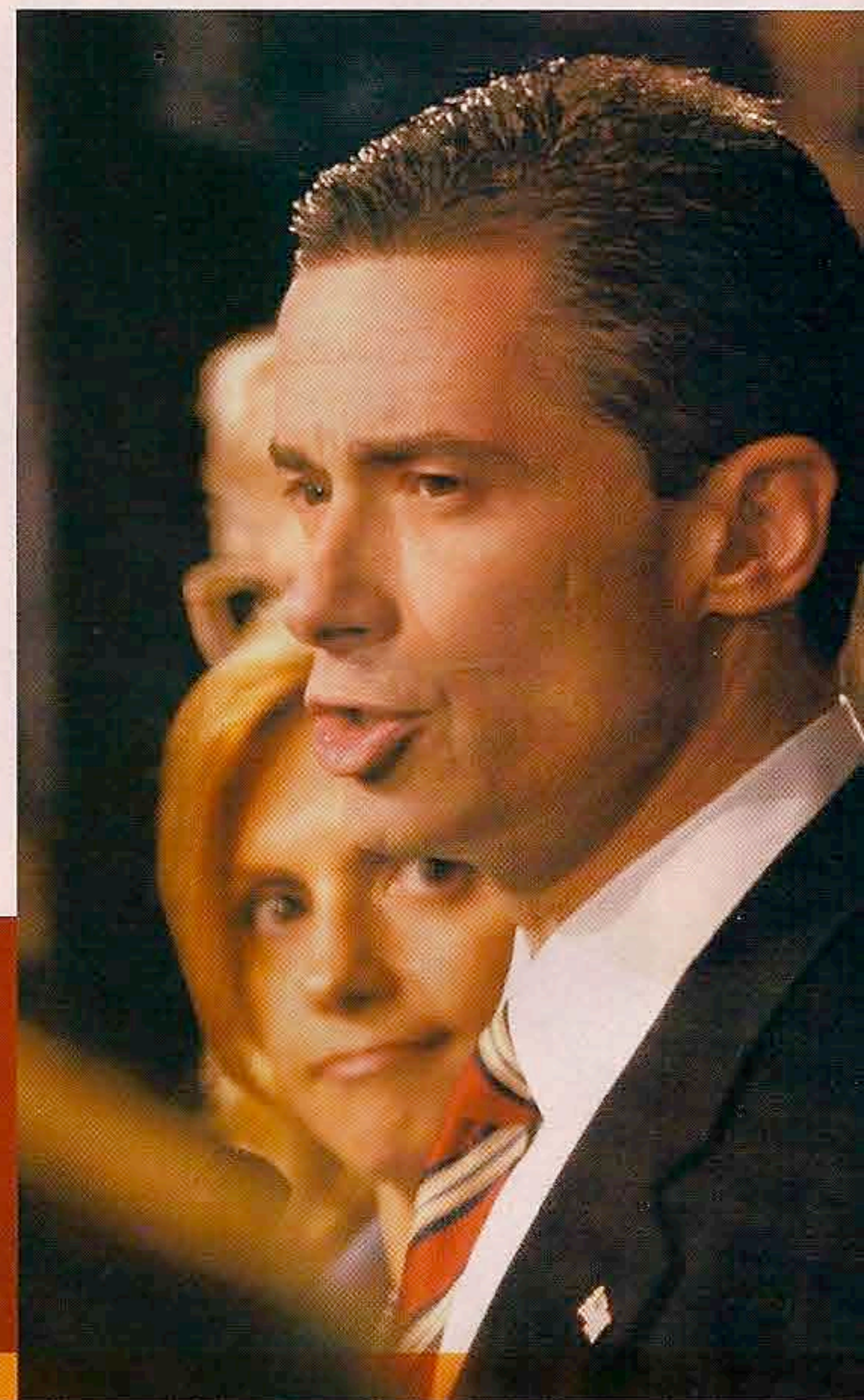
**HE'S GOT A SECRET:** Dina Matos McGreevey (near right) eyeing her husband, former New Jersey governor James McGreevey, as he declared he was gay at an August 2004 press conference.

**Opposite page:** Writer and pundit Arianna Huffington getting a love peck from her then husband, congressional hopeful Michael Huffington, in 1991; after divorcing her, he came out as a homosexual.

out of the denial and repression that allowed them to marry, believing that loving and being loved by a woman could help them overcome attraction to the same sex. Almost certainly they have feared the loss of their jobs, social status, family ties, the benediction of their churches....

Or the shiny "fruit salad" on a navy dress uniform. When Mary Ryan met her husband in 1992, he was attending flight school in Pensacola, Florida—the son of not one but two military officers, and Catholic. "I think that had a big impact on his waiting so long to come out," she says. "Here was this guy, a pilot but not cocky, very smart, very cultured, very charming. On our first date, he cooked

dinner for me, and that night when I was driving home, I looked to my left and there he was in his car. I was thinking: *Did I leave my purse?* I got off this mile-long bridge, and he came up to my car with the flowers he'd had on the dinner table, saying, 'I want you to know that romance isn't dead.' I called my mother when I got home, and she said, 'Don't let him get away.'" Their courtship was "romantic and sweet" rather than erotic, says Ryan. "He was very respectful, and I thought he



was a gentleman. I asked if he was gay because he didn't put the moves on me the way most men did. He said that he'd been engaged before and didn't want to be hurt again, so he was making sure that he was in a good relationship. A lot of his friends were surprised that he was getting married—they didn't know that he was dating anyone. Looking back, I see that it all worked out in his comfort zone."

The newlyweds settled in Los Angeles, where he flew search and rescue missions for the coast guard. "Sex wasn't the greatest," she says, "but that was not what the relationship was based on. I thought he was a bit inexperienced and soon we'd be

on the same wavelength." Whenever her husband talked about being "attracted to people," Ryan assumed he was referring to their appealing qualities like wit or intelligence. "I filtered it through my version of what those words meant," she admits. In their sixth year of marriage, his words were more explicit: "I am attracted to men." Reeling and confused, Ryan sought couples counseling and listened to the options. "The therapist said my husband could act on those feelings but that I would not stay in the marriage, or he could choose to put them on a shelf and remain married. We both wanted that, and we wanted to start a family. But immediately after our son was born, he started shying away again, getting less communicative. He was working as a consultant, taking the red-eye in on Thursday nights, leaving on Monday mornings. He was able to lead this secret life." About a month after their son's second birthday, her husband announced, "I am a gay man."

There are an infinite variety of reactions to this kind of bombshell. In the recent film *Far from Heaven*, the wife's oblique response is a non sequitur: "Mr. Maynard left an estimate for the roof," and indeed some women are too discomfited

for any details or discussion, even if a prohibition against the subject makes them feel more cut off; others want to hear everything that's been kept secret about their husband's closeted life. In an earlier generation, the revelation could have meant the end of a marriage, but today there are plausible new arrangements with their own acronym: MOMs, or mixed-orientation marriages. Some women prefer the security of a fractured marriage to the prospect of an unknown future, perhaps trying to sacrifice their own needs to what they believe are the needs of their children, thinking they can handle the reduced role of being a husband's soul mate or "best friend," although now, demonstrably, not his preferred sexual partner. If the husband also wishes to stay married, a different relationship may be negotiated, perhaps open marriage with a twist (they stay married and both see other men) or limited infidelity (any and all sexual encounters with others take place elsewhere so their home is not "tainted"). One woman Amity Buxton came across drew up a "contract" that read: "Jerry can be out two weekend nights a month, but one weekend night will be with Siri [the wife] for at least four hours. Jerry can have

six outside sexual activities a month, no more than two a week, and these need to be with different partners. Be home by midnight, call if late, no overnights, and no surprises."

**F**OR MARY RYAN, THERE was only one possible denouement. "I asked the therapist, 'Tell me what my life would look like if I stayed with him.' She said, 'You'd have the emotional part of the relationship, not the physical part.' It didn't feel good when I thought about it. I was scared, but I believe I know what true love is: It's letting someone go because you want him to be happy and find peace. There's a flood of feelings you're trying to sort out when this happens. It rocks your foundation, causes you to question every decision you've ever made, to ask, *What's wrong with me?* You even go through a honeymoon period after he comes out, when you think you can work through things, stay together, resume a normal relationship. But he was living a lie with me, and lying even more to himself. He said he knew from the time he was 10 or 12 years old that he was different. His older brother told him, 'My friends and I are going to toughen you up.' He wanted to fit in, and as long as it looked good, that's what mattered."

The divorce was finalized last summer, and 39-year-old Ryan now lives in the South, with her 4-year-old son, working for a consulting firm. "When I date, I'm open and up-front about why I'm divorced," she says. "I've had men who said, 'I can't go there.' That's fine. But this is my son's father, and I will have no bashing."

The "honeymoon" period described by Ryan is one of four classic stages of reaction enumerated by William Wedin, PhD, director of Bisexual Psychological Services in New York City—the others are humiliation, rage, and resolution. "In the humiliation phase, the wife may blame herself for not being woman enough to keep him interested; she may question whether they ever really had anything, and almost all husbands assume their wives will leave them, so they're waiting for the ax to fall. The honeymoon stage comes when the man says that he wants to stay in the marriage for good CONTINUED ON PAGE 259

One woman drew up a contract that read:

**"Be home by midnight, call if late, no overnights, and no surprises."**



## WHEN GAY MEN HAPPEN TO...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 239

reasons, that he really loves his wife. The more he has genuine heterosexual feelings for her and empathizes with what she's going through, the more she will feel that this is the man she married. And almost every man is blown away by her saying that she wants to stay with him; he feels tremendous acceptance and love. The rage stage is when they both come to the limits of what's possible. What happens in the resolution phase depends on a lot of different factors: kids, social considerations, also the question of where the man really falls in terms of his sexual and romantic feelings."

But Wedin also differentiates between bisexual and gay men. "These terms are smushed together, almost with hyphens," he says, noting that some communities and cultures have more bisexual men than others. (The phenomenon of married men who secretly sleep with other men has been christened "living on the down low" in the African-American community.) "A lot of men tend to sexualize their needs for intimacy, especially in industries like Wall Street, where men are trained to be

at each other's throats. The only way they know how to have intimacy with someone is to have sex with them. Very often when I've run groups for married bisexual men, just spontaneously as they became closer to each other, there was a decline in their desire for sex outside the marriage. It wasn't a conversion; they began to learn that sex and intimacy can be separated as well as joined.

"It's true that sexuality does fall along some kind of continuum. But oftentimes you find a man who's predominantly heterosexual—that's why he got into marriage to begin with. He's being as honest as he knows how to be. Not many men except perhaps some Hollywood actors would get married thinking, *This is bound to fail*. Once he announces he has homosexual feelings and may or may not have acted on them, his wife and often a therapist get on his case: 'Didn't you know all along?' There's a term in psychology called shaping behavior: History gets rewritten and the guy is turned into a liar and a louse. The man is so confused and guilt-ridden, he says, 'Let me do you a favor and get out of the marriage.' He follows the

program, gets divorced, adopts a gay lifestyle, and then he's in the shower fantasizing about sex with his ex-wife."

Whether latent or overt, a minor or defining trait, a man's attraction to other men typically makes his wife feel sexually rejected and bereft of the mate she thought she had, according to Buxton. She may be furious at her role as a shield, questioning her concept of marriage, facing the breakup of her family, and often wondering in the most self-flagellating way what marrying this man says about her. Life will never be the same. "It typically takes at least a year to resolve the pragmatic issues of damaged sexuality, changed relationship, and conflicting parent-spouse roles," writes Buxton. "Two or more years are generally needed to resolve the more complex issues of fragmented identity, integrity, family configuration, and belief system. All told, it usually takes more than three years to construct a new life and far longer to look dispassionately at the experience."

"We're one big happy family most of the time now," says 40-year-old Lori Sand of Atlanta, "but it wasn't always like that." Sand is referring to her 12-year-old ▶

# some like it hot.

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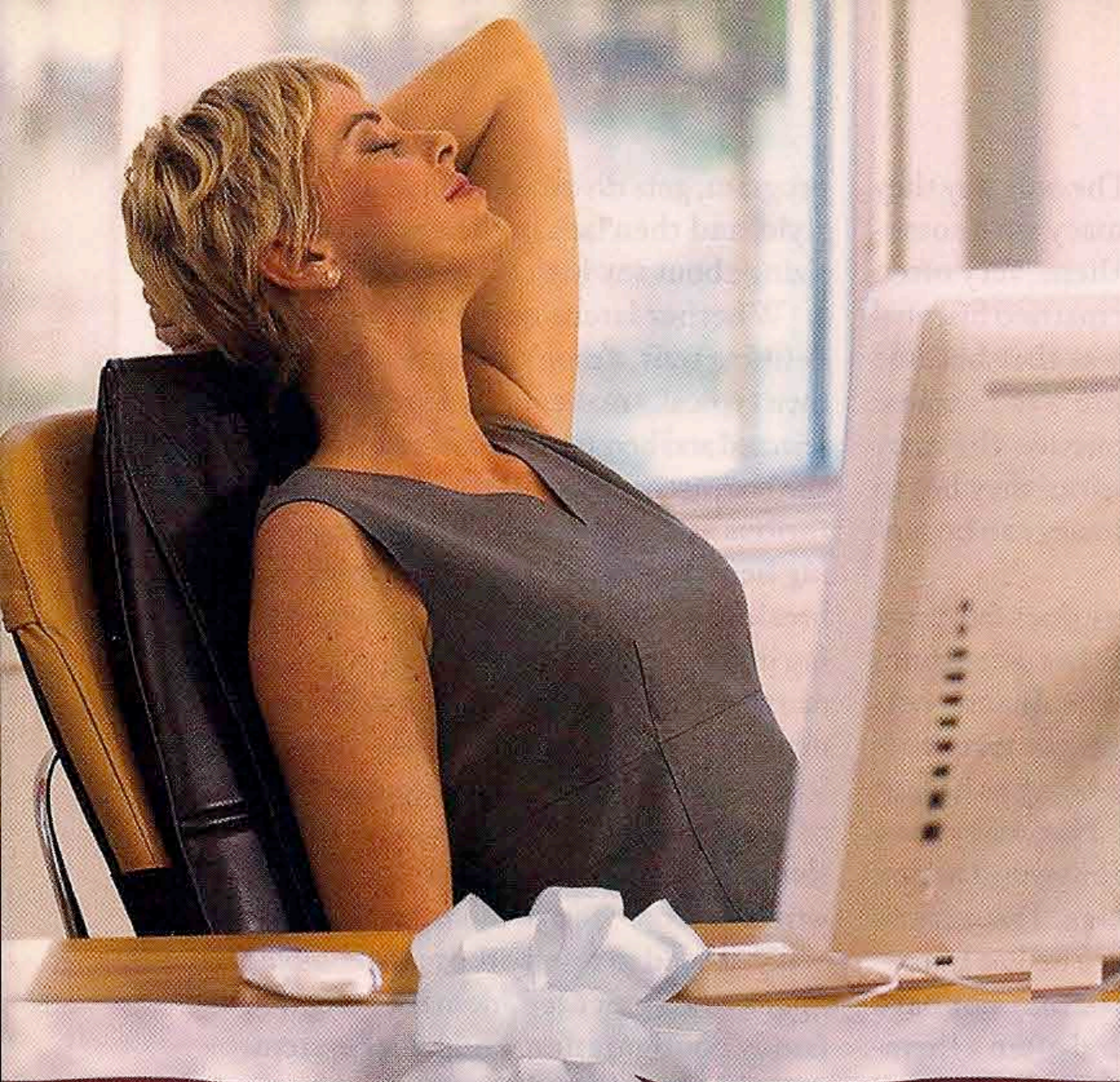
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 259

daughter, her 7-year-old son, their father, his male partner, and her boyfriend. "For a long time before he came out, I think my husband and I both felt like we were walking on eggshells, neither of us quite sure what we'd come home to," she says. "I was moody, not knowing what to expect, and he probably felt trapped." Over the dozen years they were married, sex lacked a certain spontaneity, creativity, and variety in who took initiative. "But we had two kids who didn't sleep through the night, didn't even want to sleep in their own beds, so our sex life was really easy to ignore for both of us. Things get stagnant, and there's habit. I didn't think there was anything that unusual about us."

Sand is an occupational therapist in the local school system; her husband traveled for his job in marketing. "There was more than enough opportunity for him to surf the Internet or visit gay bars. Before he came out, he often told me, 'You've got to make yourself happy; I can't do it,' and the more he kept telling me this, the more I thought, *I guess I'm not really happy*. I had not fallen out of love with him, I still wanted to be married to him, but something had to change.

"One morning I was half-asleep, and he said, 'I just can't be who you want me to be.' I'd asked on several occasions if there was someone else. Now I asked, 'Are you trying to tell me you're gay?' He said he didn't know, but I felt he really did—it was just easier to say it that way, like pulling the Band-Aid half off. I was torn between being really, really angry and feeling that someone had to support this person. He would say, 'I can't help it that I'm gay,' but he hadn't taken responsibility for some of his behaviors before coming out. He hadn't been honest with me. That doesn't have anything to do with being gay. He was the president of the synagogue at the time, this wonderful upstanding person in the community—it annoyed the living daylights out of me. I know he loved me; otherwise it wouldn't have been so hard for him. How could he have put me in physical jeopardy? It was a question I repeated over and over."

When children are old enough to be aware of the situation, they may be embarrassed about their nontraditional family and insecure about their own sexual identity, according to Buxton. If there is a divorce, they may feel divided loyalties to their parents, one in shock, both in pain. "Positive identification with both parents is critical to the children's development of self-esteem, identity, and sense of security," says Buxton. It is an objective that Lori Sand has fostered. "I was determined from the start that he and I were going to be friends, that this was not going to get the best of me," she says, and her children have benefited from candid information about their parents and the civilized relations between them. Sand's boyfriend lives in another state, and her ex stays in her house with the children when she goes out of town. "Once, while we were in line at Wal-Mart, my son said, 'When you get remarried, I'll have a stepfather, and when Dad gets remarried, I'll have a stepmother. No, that's wrong because Dad lives with a man.' I was thinking, *Must we have this conversation in Wal-Mart?* Now I don't care. His dream would be all six of us living in one house, because everyone he loves would be right there. But we've also warned the kids, 'One day somebody is going to call your daddy a fag.'"

It is not uncommon, in the war stories of straight spouses, to hear about children who know almost intuitively what is going on. For Aline Williams, a medical social worker in Dallas, there was a pointed question from her firstborn son, then all of 6 years old: "Is Dad gay?" Williams and her husband had met when both were teaching English as a second language to executives in Brazil, and their two-year friendship became a romance. After marriage and the birth of two boys, she says, "everybody looked at us and saw a perfect family. All we needed was a house with a picket fence. But he was really workaholic—he taught morning, afternoon, and night, and on weekends he graded papers. We rarely talked, and he didn't spend much time with the kids. Sex was like popcorn without salt—something was missing. You go to step one, step two, step three, and you get your goal accomplished, but it wasn't flavorful. We'd do it every day for a week, then go two months without it. When I brought up the subject after a dry spell, his response was that I liked it too much or he was too tired. He had a lot of issues with his dad, who was alcoholic, and I always attributed some of his distance to his upbringing. When you don't want to look at the real issue, you find a reason."

When her husband wanted to work on his PhD in the United States, Williams thought a change of scene might be good, but two years after they'd settled in Texas, she said, "You need to tell me what's wrong." That elicited a confession. "I still didn't get it," she says, amazed at her own obtuseness. "He said, 'I'm a homosexual,' and I said, 'No, you're not.' I have cousins who are gay, so it's not strange to me, but it didn't occur to me that anyone who knew he was gay would ever marry. I was very angry, but I didn't want to lose my marriage, so I sat with it for a year. He slept in the living room, and I read everything I could find. I realized I didn't want to be married to him anymore. There had been sexual rejection—you're 'frigid,' 'oversexed,' I heard them all—and I was tired of being put down. He was mad at the world, and it came down on me." Williams, now 44 and remarried for three years, never hid the issue from her sons. "We didn't want to wait until they were teens and having to deal with their own stuff as well as their dad's stuff. It's not something they advertise; they don't do things with friends at their dad's house. And they've asked, 'Why did Dad marry you?' I tell them he just couldn't face it."

It's difficult to get meaningful statistics about how many such dads there are—that estimate of two million men and women is unofficial, cobbled together from what is reported about same-sex behavior. "This is not something people want to reveal about themselves," says Stephanie Sanders, PhD, associate director of the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University. "One of the things we always face in sex research is that revealing behaviors considered taboo can put somebody at risk—social risk." Public health studies often ask about behavior, not how people identify themselves. "We just want to know what kind of genitals went into what kind of genitals," jokes Sanders. "What we're dealing with is this discrepancy between behavior and identification. Sexual orientation is self-labeling. But 'What do I think I am?' and 'What am I doing?' are often different." Same-sex experience for married people is nothing new: In the 1940s, when Alfred Kinsey did his original research, about 70 percent of the gay men reported that they'd slept with a married man at least once, ▶



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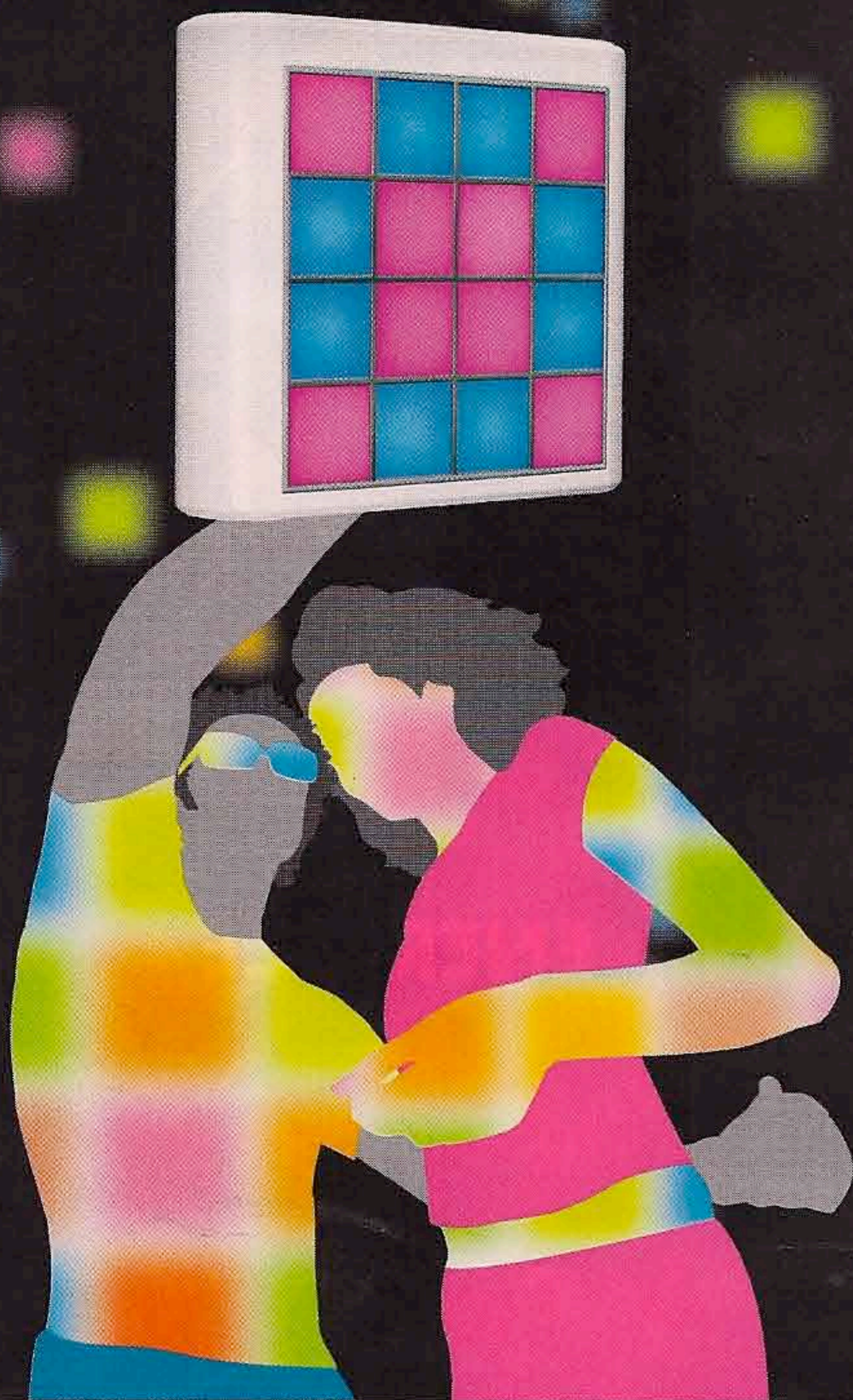
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 261

and about half of the lesbians reported the same about married women. "The other thing is what counts as sex," says Sanders. "In 1991, 60 percent of the college students surveyed said it was not sex if it was just oral, and about 20 percent said it was not sex if it was just anal. A penis in a vagina was sex—Clinton didn't invent this concept. Even how the same behavior gets labeled can depend on context: 'It doesn't count if I'm not penetrated, if it's being done to me, if I don't have an orgasm....' There are all kinds of ways people conceptualize sex to hold on to their identity and not violate any rules they have about their marriage."

Internet postings about straight spouses often show links to sites about depression, crisis counseling, and suicide. Russ Chapman understands why. On the evening in 1998 that he learned about his wife's lesbian lover, he says, "I put the kids to bed and found myself out in the garage playing with a rope, making a noose." Yes, it happens to men, too. Chapman, a 45-year-old chef in Bergen County, New Jersey, met his wife in the Irish pub where he had a summer job. "I hounded her for two years until she finally agreed to go out with me," he relates. They dated for two years and were married for 12, with two young children. "I would say our courtship was quite sexually based. We didn't have that much in common—she was into punk rock, I was into country music—but I was very much in love, and I thought the marriage was a good one. Over a short period of time, I began to notice a change." One evening, while out to dinner with friends, Chapman put his arm around his wife and was pushed away. Thinking, *Uh-oh, what did I do?* he raised the subject the next day; she blew it off, said she didn't mean anything by the gesture. But his suspicions were raised. Earlier in the marriage, he'd discovered that his wife had been unfaithful with another man, a crisis that they'd weathered. This time he started looking for evidence and found a love letter signed by a woman, a family friend in Ohio. When his wife was confronted, she began, "I've been meaning to talk to you..."

Deciding that he would "fix" whatever was wrong, Chapman spent the next several months telling his wife that he loved her. "I was trying to show how much she and the marriage meant to me," he says. "She was involved in local politics at the time, and I went to all the dinners, played the good husband. I have a picture of me, almost identical to Mrs. McGreevey, like the deer caught in headlights. But at one point I said, 'I need to know what we're doing. I want to keep the family together, but you have to decide what you want.' She packed up and went away for a couple of days, came back on a Sunday morning and asked me for a divorce." He had gone through the earlier infidelity too shamed to confide in friends or family. This time he determined not to go through it alone. One leering buddy asked if he at least got to "watch" the two women before the separation.

"With a lot of men," he says, "their initial reaction was, 'I'd rather it be a woman than a man,' but they're wrong. If it was another man, I could do my hair differently, I could learn how to be a better lover, I could punch his lights out, but with this I could not compete. I felt I was the only man dopey enough to marry a lesbian. One of the toughest things for me was when I was looking at her journal. She wrote that when she was with

her lover, it was the first time she could open her eyes because it was where she wanted to be. Fourteen years of lovemaking with this woman flashed by, and her eyes were always closed. I thought, *Was I ever there when we were having sex?* It's not only the loss of the future you envision together but also a huge sense that you've lost your past."

All comparisons are odious, but the learning to "unlove" that comes with ending any marriage may be particularly devastating when the reasons are so totally beyond one's control—and often in the middle of what appeared to be a nice life. "He seemed perfect," says Sandy Smith of the man she met at their conservative Christian college and married in 1994. "He was kind and caring. I'm not a big sports fanatic, and he wasn't either. Sex wasn't that great, but I wasn't that experienced. You know something's wrong but can't put your finger on it, and you don't know the right questions to ask." Not long after their marriage, he became dejected and withdrawn; Smith found herself wanting to be with other people as bolsters, but when she enlisted the help of her husband's sister and got him on antidepressants, he seemed to blossom and gain confidence, especially during the two years that the couple spent overseas. When they moved back to California, Smith earned a good living as an advertising executive while her husband completed graduate school. "At one point, he revealed that he'd had some teenage experiences with other guys," she recalls. "I never asked how far they got, but that information just sat in a corner of the room. Gradually he got more and more unhappy, so my little game of being around other people and being in complete denial was starting to come apart."

It was in the eighth year of marriage that he blurted out, "I think I may be gay." Her response was, "When you decide, can you let me know?" But she didn't panic. "He went to different counselors, and I basically gave him space to figure it out. We were good friends, we were connected, we still made plans together. He said, 'I choose you, I love you, I want to be with you.' But there was no more than a year between the times he said 'I think' and 'I am.'"

"I went into an emotional coma, didn't tell anyone, wouldn't even write it in a journal. I was petrified about AIDS—he got tested immediately—and my doctor was the only one I told. Nobody else—I didn't have the heart to betray this person who had betrayed me. He was studying for exams, and my family was coming for graduation—the whole time we were still putting up the happily married facade. I kept losing a lot of weight, and one day I felt so sick, I thought: *I'm going to die.* But no one asked what was wrong; people probably assumed I was anorexic. Finally one friend asked, 'Are you okay?' and it came out. She was a nursing student and started coming up with information for me."

Smith and her husband spent three sessions with a therapist who let them know that sometimes counseling helps terminate a marriage rather than save it. "But it was all about him, what he'd been going through, and I was sitting there thinking, *I'm dying.* The whole thing made filing the divorce papers easier." The marriage finally ended last August, one week before what would have been their tenth wedding anniversary, and the hurt is still so raw that Smith cannot speak of it to me without a large supply of Kleenex nearby. "I felt used, damaged, scared of being alone, sure that no one would want me. This was not supposed ▶



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## WHEN GAY MEN HAPPEN TO...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 263

to be the way my life is. But there was nothing I could do: I don't have a penis." Her former husband is still not open about his sexual identity, so she is using a pseudonym here, still protecting him. But earlier this year, as part of her recovery, she went to a Straight Spouse Network national conference in Minnesota. "One day there were at least 20 of us crammed into an elevator at the Mall of America. There was only one person not with our group, and someone said, 'I bet you can't guess what we have in common.' And we told her. I say that I came out of his closet in Minnesota." She has also started to date again, with black humor. "I don't feel like I had a true marriage—everything I thought I had was a lie, so I don't know what a real relationship is. My marriage was doomed before I even got married, and I didn't know it. Learning to trust myself has been a long journey. Everyone is gay until proven innocent."

Recovery inevitably involves 20/20 hindsight about signs that something was wrong, says Sharon Nathan, PhD, a sex therapist in private practice in New York City. "You think you were living one kind of life, and you find out you weren't. You wonder, *All the time that I thought such and such, what was really happening?* It's shattering. And there's a lot of reclamation work." The signs might include a pattern of homophobic comments, a reluctance to hug friends of the same sex, phone numbers scratched off notepads or body-blocking to cover up a Web site on a computer screen. "A spouse may wonder what clues were missed," says Nathan, "and clues are a lot easier to find today because of telephone records and the Internet."

Elizabeth Jones\* began to pick up clues about her husband of 25 years without benefit of technology, and before she even knew what she was seeing. "All of a sudden he had a few friends who were very different," she says. "One day I was taking my daughter to school, and his organizer was on the car seat, open. I noticed strange names I didn't recognize—'Indian Joe,' 'Big Jim.' I also began to look at his calendar, and things just didn't gel: On a Saturday when I thought he was at the Y, there were directions to a home somewhere in a different area code. This was before we were computer literate, and there was no caller ID, but I began to call some of the phone numbers I saw. I always began with 'I'd like to speak to the lady of the house,' and I got a variety of responses—giggles, or 'We don't have one,' or 'Would you like to apply?' I just kind of knew. One night I sat him down and said, 'You're going to have to tell me what's going on.'"

After his confession, Jones put in for a transfer at the government agency where she worked, but without saying why. "I was so angry about the risks he'd put me through. When he began seeing men, we were still quite active sexually, and he was not using protection. I cried so much during that time, but I'd get up the next day and go to work, and no one had a clue. We both could have won Academy Awards." Somehow the planning never materialized into the leaving; neither of them seemed prepared to give up on the marriage. "And finally he said, 'Why don't we just move on together?' It was that easy."

And so, ten years after the disclosure that rocked their world, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, both 59 years old, just celebrated their 35th anniversary, with five grandchildren and one more on the way.

The only person in on their secret is her best friend—not even their three children know the truth, which is why she is using a pseudonym here. “At one point he would have been open to my telling anyone I needed to,” she says, “but I think what we decided is that it’s like talking about your sex life, which we wouldn’t do anyway. By the same token, it seems a bit unfair to the people I know and love.” She recently survived a cancer scare (her husband was a pillar of support), and although her prognosis is good, she says, “I’ve given my friend permission to discuss this with my children if anything happened to me.”

Now here’s the head-scratching part: Jones says she and her husband can still have a satisfying sexual relationship (using protection), but she does not know or ask if he continues to have homosexual affairs. “He has said that he can shelve the feelings, but I think there were periods when he fell off the wagon. I’ve not made any deals, not extracted any promises, but he knows what my beliefs are. I don’t believe even this revelation gives him the right to go outside our marriage. I don’t approve weekends away, and he doesn’t bring boyfriends home. We are not as active as we once were, maybe several times a month, maybe we’ll skip several months. It’s not the all-important thing it once was. If this had happened earlier in our marriage, we never would have lasted. Too much of my identity was wrapped up in being his wife and our need for each other.”

Today Jones proclaims that their relationship is “really good,” with many shared interests and no elephant in the middle of the room. “We discussed it so much for such a long time—now it’s not even a usual topic of conversation. I would not have chosen this marriage, but he’s a wonderful person to know. We’re two very different people than when we started; at this point our lives have just taken a different turn. But I never bought him another anniversary card until this year—there are certain things you just can’t do.” And she does voice concern lest anyone see her story as having a happy ending. “This is the worst hurt, like a death, and there are no sympathizers coming to the home,” she says. “A lot of women assume, *He did not love me*. I’ve never doubted that he loved me. But love does not trump gay.” ●

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