

My family is from the rural Southeastern part of China. I was born in Hong Kong, but I immigrated to the United States at a very young age. My family's background comes from a very conservative, traditional, Confucian lifestyle.

Growing up, I knew I was different. In middle school, when puberty started to hit, I realized that I was attracted to men, not women. In middle school, high school, and undergraduate college, I felt as though I was living a lie, hiding a secret from my family. My relationship with them was strained, and I never told them much about my life. Every so often, my parents tried to set me up with nice Chinese girls they knew, but always I vehemently refused. Because of this, I didn't spend much time at home after leaving for college.

During college, I came out to my close friends. Most of them were supportive of me, but others turned me away and did not want to be my friend. It was difficult at first to let these people go, especially because of something I was born with, but I came to realize that they were not my real friends. It was my close friends who helped me through the difficult times, and I could speak to them about my problems and situations.

After finishing my undergraduate college, I decided I could no longer live a secretive double life. I came out of the closet to see how the rest of the world treated me before wanting to tell my family. I came out to old friends, and to new friends I did not make my sexuality a secret, though I did not tell everyone I met unless they specifically asked.

It was after coming out that I started to meet other people like myself; not all gay people are the flamboyant or effeminate people portrayed in the news or on television. I learned that being gay didn't have to define your life; it was just a part of your life. I still have more straight friends than gay friends, which is okay with me. It was after becoming comfortable with my sexuality that gave me self-confidence and made me ready for a relationship. I was able to find the love of my life, and we had been together for six years.

After being in a committed relationship, I finally decided to come out to my family. I first told my brother and sister-in-law in 2003. They were supportive of me and of my relationship. It was 2 years later when I flew home and came out to my parents. It was incredibly difficult to do, and I was so scared that I almost changed my mind and didn't tell them.

I told my mother first. She took it better than I expected in some respects (e.g., no yelling), but there was a lot of crying and of convincing me that I could change, and that it's a choice. This conversation was the first time I spoke with my mom where she used the word "God" many times in our conversation (e.g., Why would God make you this way? What did our family do wrong that God would punish us?), and it was frightening. She cried and asked me not to tell my father. She said it would crush him, and begged me to lie or to just tell my father that I didn't want to get married. I agreed to that because it was not a complete lie, though not a complete truth either.

The next day my mother forced the situation, telling my dad during dinner before I got the words out. They spent the next hour convincing me that

I wasn't gay, and that they're going to find a nice Chinese girl for me. They said there were no gay people in China, and that this was an American affliction. They wanted me to move out of the house that my "roommate" and I were living in, even though we dated for over 3 years. They believed they could make some Chinese medicine to cure me. A few hours later, my dad's status deteriorated from "trying to convince me" to being really, really, sad. This was the second toughest part that I envisioned, the first being the yelling and screaming.

My parents had to go through a healing process. Little did I know, so did I. I thought once everything was out in the open, I would feel better and be able to live my own life, but it took months for me to return to where I was before mentally, and to help my parents sort through what they're feeling/believing.

After I returned to my home, my dad would call and ask me to listen to his stories. He said he was nervous when he met my mom, and that I had the same nervousness he had, except I never got over it. I tried to explain to him there was a fundamental difference between being nervous and knowing when you're attracted to women versus not attracted to women. We argued over the fact that he wanted me to date women just to be sure and whether or not I was "happy" in a sexual sense. Also, my father described how it felt to touch a woman, which was uncomfortable listening to him talk about sex. He hated it when I told him it wasn't a choice. He made it sound like sexuality was a class, and if I tried hard enough, I could excel in becoming straight. I felt like a broken record.

One of the most painful conversations I had with my parents was our discussion about children. They wouldn't accept adoption as a viable option because "they will turn on you since they are not of your bloodline." It hurt me enough to know I won't have children of my own blood, but to have my mom and dad crush my other options really upset me.

My mother would tell me that my father was in failing health. I spoke to my dad; he said there was "a stone in his heart" and that he had heart problems. I sat up most nights, unable to sleep. A lot of thoughts ran through my head. I wished all of the pain and frustrations to go away. The situation got so bad that my relatives told me that my father wanted to move down to North Carolina and to force me to live at home.

My mom went to visit a Chinese psychic. I made it very clear to her that if I came home during the holidays and they tried to set me up with a woman, I would never come home again. Even one year later, my parents and I argued. My father refused to speak to me on the phone for a month. Every time I called my parents, we discussed the same topics we always talked about since I came out to them (e.g., dating women, changing myself). It got to the point where I told my mother that I couldn't help her stop worrying about me. She had to accept the fact that I was happy, and we were happy together. If that worried my parents, then I had no choice but to cause them grief and frustration. I had to live my own life, not the one they planned for me.

Thankfully I had supportive cousins who were able to explain to their parents what it meant to be gay. They understood it was not a choice, but something you were born with. They also told me that in Chinese culture, even though all of my relatives knew about my sexuality, they ignored it until my parents were ready to tell them. My uncle mentioned to my father about a famous actress in Hong Kong who turned out to be a lesbian. She committed suicide after her family pressured her, which was a way to tell him to not apply too much pressure on me. I believed that my parents had hit rock bottom. I prayed and hoped that there was nowhere else to go but up from here.

One of my best friends from high school found information on the PFLAG website that was in Chinese. I mailed them to my parents. They read it, and though they didn't agree with the articles at first, I believed it helped to change their views on being gay and Chinese. Also, I found additional information online that helped console me.

- PFLAG Chinese resources:  
<http://web.mit.edu/nayiak/www/pflag-chinese/ch-resources.htm>
- University in Shanghai to offer China's first course in homosexual studies:  
[http://advocate.com/news\\_detail.asp?id=19750](http://advocate.com/news_detail.asp?id=19750)
- The real meaning of "ex-gay":  
[http://advocate.com/exclusive\\_detail\\_ektid19739.asp](http://advocate.com/exclusive_detail_ektid19739.asp)

I didn't realize how difficult it was for my parents and me to say the simple words "I love you." I'm not sure if it's a cultural difference between China and America. We never said the words "I love you," whether it was between me and my parents or my brother, or even my dad to my mom. Since I came out to my parents, I had been ending our phone conversations with "I love you." It was extremely awkward and strange for me to say it, and it's equally awkward for them to hear me say it. Often times there was a long pause after I said it before they said it back to me. I didn't know what to make of it, but I believed it helped them to realize I was still their loving son and not some different, gay son.

It took 1.5 years before my parents started to understand that they could not change my sexuality. Our phone conversations evolved from arguments to discussions on our finances, my fiancé, my school, and other things that I never expected them to ask about. Finally, they were starting to come around.

Two years after I came to my parents, we reached a point where they accepted my sexuality, and accepted the love of my life. Though it is still an adjustment for them to go from two sons to three sons and one daughter, they have progressed enough to ask how he is doing when we speak on the phone. Now that I no longer have any secrets in my life, I can freely speak with them on the phone without any worries or concerns about lying to them. They feel as though they understand me now. My relationship with my parents has never been better since I have told them I am gay. It was one of the best things I could have done for myself and for my parents.