

This has been a hard story to tell. Many times, when I tell this story to friends, I often omit details, sometimes intentionally, because I don't always want to relive possibly the most emotionally changing and trying times in my life. As I write this, It is early July. I will discuss what happened to me in February of that same year.

I used to be one of Jehovah's witnesses.

I am also a gay man – something that inherently does not go along with the Jehovah's Witness doctrine.

Ever since I can remember, I pretty much knew I was gay. Most other kids when they come of age, they gravitate towards showing affection to the opposite sex; small chivalrous things – some would say a precursor of things to come; of how they will perform in relationships. I myself, I gravitated towards the same sex. I liked other boys; girls never really interested me. For a time, it didn't really matter. Unlike most other groups, most JW kids aren't allowed to casually date when they're young, so any sort of sexual discovery and exploration is largely ignored at a young age. I didn't really have to worry about exposure in my early teens; since no one was really allowed to discuss or think about sex or relationships anyways.

There are slight breaks in this from time to time; I remember at 13-14-15 years of age, other kids in the Kingdom Hall speaking lustfully about their crush at the kingdom hall or at school “Sister so and so is so cute, and she is spiritually minded”. Those sentences never came out of my mouth. At first, it was not an issue, I simply wasn't interested in girls. However, I started realizing more and more I was attracted to men and masculinity – women didn't really do anything for me, and I had no interest in ever being with one. With reconciling this notion in my head throughout my teenage years, I went on growing up and not expressing any ounce of what I was feeling or going through.

Because I didn't show any attraction towards the opposite sex within my budding youth, I started to get small rumors and stares both at school and in the congregation. Jehovah's witnesses are all about public perception, how one is viewed by others, how they look to the outside world. Apparently, I would routinely fail this test. I was not intentionally trying to push any envelope; I just liked what I liked, I did what I did, but evidently, what I liked and did was considered “gay” and undesirable. Everything I did was scrutinized, looked at under a microscope. As my dad was a congregation elder, and the youngest out of five “spiritual men” as my mom put it, our entire family was looked at as a pillar of support in the congregation. We were all viewed as spiritually strong; so any small ounce of anything that did not go along with this ideal was often found and snuffed out.

I was not sexually active in school. I didn't swear. I didn't have a secret boyfriend. Yet, I would always find myself on the receiving end of demoralizing counsel from “loving brothers”. Skinny jeans for men were becoming popular, and I liked the look. I was told that this is a look for 'homosexuals' and I shouldn't want to look like the world, a world that is in Satan's control. I was criticized for what I wore, how I talked, who I hung around, even the way I walked and spoke. I was often told to associate with more masculine men, since they could so-called 'show me how to be a man'. I was repeatedly counseled to “change my mannerisms” so I could not be confused as a homosexual. As a young teen, this was one of the worst times of my life. I gravitated towards certain things naturally, I was not intentionally choosing a certain way of life, a certain state of being. However, according to them I was, and I needed to be fixed.

At the same time, I had doubts about my faith in the Jehovah's Witnesses. The year 1914 never made any sense to me, and I would often have issues over very concepts, not all of them related to my sexuality. I'd often times find myself at congregation meetings intentionally not paying attention, because when I did I would often times find gaping logical holes in their doctrine. I tried to use the reasoning of "I am imperfect human, this is a perfect organization – they know far more on the matter than you do", this would somewhat quiet my doubts, but often times they would resurface. Any sort of questions I asked was either greeted with counsel, or more holes and doubts. Eventually, I stopped thinking.

Although not related to my sexuality, their manipulative ideals about higher education bothered me. Out of the youngest of five, only one of us has a college degree. I encountered all sorts of doublespeak about how higher education was OK, but of the same token I was actively discouraged from going to school. I personally watched my brother get his bachelor's degree amidst a climate of discouragement. I remember not only congregation members, but family and close friends as well tell him how much time he's wasting. I was not inclined towards physical labor – I could perform it with no issue, but I wanted to do something more. I wanted to go to college.

And with that thought, I started to get another barrage of "encouragement" to not go to college. I'd often get loaded statements telling me it was my choice, but the best choice the 'best way of living' was not to go to college and devote all my time to a religion that I did not really believe in. I could not understand it – I was watching my parents, family and many close friends follow this so called "path of happiness" but I saw nothing but grief in their lives. Many of them struggle financially, and often throw away avenues for financial advancement as confirmation that they are doing all they can for their religion. However, I was in a high-school program where I could graduate with either an associates 2 year degree, or a bachelor's degree, for free, paid in full by the local school system. None of the associate degree programs interested me, so I chose a major in a baccalaureate program, with the intent of getting roughly half done while in high school and finishing the other half upon graduating high school.

At the beginning of high school, my senior year, my father flat out told me that there was no way they could help me with schooling and finishing my degree, and I needed to choose another major. I was heartbroken. I was told it was because of money issues within the family, but on the other hand I constantly got repeatedly told how college is terrible place; look at your brother, he finished school and look how poorly he is doing spiritually. Why not pioneer? Find something part time to support yourself in the ministry, the end of the system of things is coming soon. Do you really have time to go to school; don't you know the end of the system of things is soon approaching? Is college a wise choice? Many are unemployed with a college degree – why waste time there when you can be doing the most important work; Jehovah's Service? Is your major even going to be useful in the 'new system'? Despite all those loaded questions, I was told that college was "my choice" and they would support me either way. I didn't understand this, I was told that I would be supported in my choice of going to college, but I was told it was a bad idea and I would not get support in the same sentence?

I couldn't take it. I became depressed. I felt like since I couldn't finish school anyways, I stopped caring about it. Before, I had good marks in school; I would often times be on the honor roll and merit roll based upon a respectable GPA. Near the end, I stopped caring. I didn't study, there was no point, I couldn't finish my schooling with any support, and my GPA tanked. I graduated high school, and instead of continuing my schooling, I dropped out for a short while. This drop out was praised by my parents and friends who thought that I was making the "right" decision to serve Jehovah. I just

wanted to make sense of life – I was 18, gay, and unsure of what to do next.

I became a dedicated, baptized Jehovah's Witness at the age of 16. Although I was still unsure of the doctrine, I felt as if it were the right thing to do. I was repeatedly told how things change after baptism, and things are more clear and focused. I started to really come to terms with my homosexuality and felt that baptism would straighten me out, or at least help me to cope better. I also wanted to drive, and I was told by my parents that they couldn't trust me behind the wheel of a car, if I couldn't control my homosexual habits – something I confided with them to 'help' me with. I really tried to put my best into the religion, but the more I thought critically about the doctrine, the more it didn't hold water.

Baptism was one of the worst things I could have done. It trapped me in a cult that didn't respect my inner being. By my mid teens, I had come to terms with the fact that I was a gay man – however, asking for help was nearly out of the question. I confided my parents; mother a longtime, faithful JW and my father an elder. I was told my sexuality was due to human imperfection, and I needed to fight hard against it, and that everyone still loved and respected me just the same. However, what I heard at the kingdom hall was different – I would hear borderline hate speeches, with special attention given towards homosexuals. It was pretty common for other members to look at gays with contempt and speak hurtful slurs in private about them. I heard on a constant basis of how homosexuality is unnatural and disgusting, and how they will be destroyed at Armageddon. Although most usually agreed in earnest, I would always wince at such hateful logic.

Around sophomore year in high-school, I had a close JW friend from an equally (if not more so) “spiritually strong” family, tell my elder father that I was at school having sex with men. This was a rumor that blindsided me totally – and started a hard inquiry to straighten me out, so to speak. This was a person I thought was my friend. I could have been disfellowshipped right then if that rumor had been proven true. However, what bothered me more was the utterly patronizing tone that was taken with me. Yet again, this time even more so, everything I did was examined closely under a microscope – and finally I was asked if I was gay. I said no. Then, I was told how homosexuals have sex, as if I didn't know, and told once more what disgusting lifestyle this is and how I had to work my hardest to distance myself from it in any way, shape, or form.

I started to become more and more depressed. At school, some of my closer “school friends” came out of the closet to a system of love, support, understanding, and acceptance. They could at least entertain the notion of a relationship. I started to see my contemporaries start to date, at least whatever the JW flawed version of dating is, but I could not do so. I started to hate all couples, and worst of all I hated myself. I hated my own very being, I hated myself. I started to put on weight, so I felt increasingly unattractive. All the while, I had to force myself to stop thinking about a doctrine that never made sense. Yet, because I was in the “truth” I was viewed as a source of pride, somewhat, among my parents. Inside, I seriously entertained the notion of suicide. I thought suicide would really help – I would be resurrected in the “new system” as a fixed, happy, straight male.

I started finding out that rumors had been circulating among the JW youth, and as such I started getting treated differently. Not only was I not a pioneer and I had planned on going to college to finish my degree, but I had leanings toward being a homosexual. I often was alone a lot. I couldn't really talk to non JW friends, either – I was discouraged from getting close to them since they would destroy me spiritually, and ultimately cause my death at Armageddon. I tried to really focus on the religion again, but the more I thought about it, the more I tried, the less it made sense. I prayed for it to make sense, but nothing was working. I started to get lower and lower. I became increasingly reclusive, I'd often times spend much of my time alone. Suicide started to look more and more attractive. I was very gay,

and I was practicing a special form of denial that was killing myself inside. I entertained the notion of trying to find a “sister” to possibly marry, however I realized that would be incredibly cruel to her. I even had my own mother call me a “faggot” - a word that literally inspired to jump out of a moving car out of rage.

I was always told that as a Jehovah's Witness, we should never entertain “apostate material”. I was repeatedly told that they were liars, and they “twist the scriptures” and they “hate Jehovah” and have nothing insightful to add. The JW.org was the only website online that offered truth on Jehovah's Witnesses, and everything else was not sanctioned and their sources were dubious, at best. This sort of conditioning stops one from doing any sort of inquiry into the hard facts, the history of the faith – I was conditioned to think that literally anything critical of the religion was from Satan, lies and persecution from the devil himself. I was told that they too would be destroyed in the battle of Armageddon and if we were to even look at that material, we would suffer the same fate.

Naturally, this discouraged me from doing any research into the organization. However, I was becoming increasingly depressed, and I felt that there was no hope, no way out. Surely, I couldn't be only person in the organization who was gay, right? I had read a couple “experiences” in various JW publications, but none of them I identified with. They often glossed over or had an entirely twisted notion of what human sexuality is – they only focused on the actual sexual relations part. Those experiences often showed a changed 'brother' or 'sister' who abstains from 'wrong sex acts' and maybe possibly they have a wife or husband and with kids, and it goes on to talk about how 'god blesses them' for abstaining from gay sex and how they put faith in him to cure them in the new system of their 'ailment'. It made me sick to my stomach, and made me feel worthless at the same time. Other information made me feel equally worthless; some of the latest information on homosexuality goes out of its way to make sure they've blamed the victim for how they feel. Reading their literature did not encourage me, it made me feel worse.

I toyed around for a few weeks on doing a simple Google search of “Gay Jehovah's Witness”. I knew I would likely get some “apostate material” and I was sure I would get dragged out of the “truth”, or at least get counseled to the point of disfellowshipping. But, I was so depressed, that soon I feared I would be dead. Finally, one night I decided to go ahead and Google the term “Gay Jehovah's Witness” and I came across a story about an Australian boy who came out to his parents and the feelings and emotions he experienced in his life. I was in total shock. I expected to disprove it, expecting some raunchy, hate-filled, overly sexual story and I thought it would boost me to stay a JW, but instead I found a story about a real person that I identified with totally. My heart raced, I was terrified yet incredibly excited, and I finally found comfort in knowing that I was not alone. However, I had broken their rule about looking at “apostate material” and I know that telling anyone about what I had seen would land me in more trouble.

Over the next few weeks, I became more bitter towards the JW's. How could they smile in your face, yet treat each other with such contempt, and feel justified in doing so? I started to realize that they never really liked me at all – they only liked me because they had the idea I was a straight, woman-loving, Jehovah's Witness who, like most males, wanted to become an Elder or some other position of authority later in life.

I started reading about other gay Jehovah's witnesses, and I agreed with them. I started to do my research about the history of the religion. I started to realize my doubts were not unfounded; the Cherry Picking of quotes, the nonsensical date chronology, the unfounded hate, the doublespeak and strongarm suggestion of making certain decisions – it all made sense. I felt liberated. I finally realized I was right

in being skeptical.

The next few weeks at the Kingdom hall became utter hell. I was literally shaking at meetings. I could see them for all they were, and I wondered if anyone else could. People were accepting their lies hook, line, and sinker. I knew that if I were to tell anyone, no one would believe me, I would quickly be silenced, thrown out and shunned by everyone I knew. I got so emotional, that sometimes during this process I would cry. I wasn't allowed to be gay, and now I knew too much to stay. I made a resolve to leave, but I wasn't sure how I could do it. I just knew that for my sanity, I needed to leave.

I started to plan practically – I attempted to set out a course of action on how to leave, but I started to realize how handicapped I really was. I was incredibly unsure of my sexuality, and not sure how to make sense of it now that I had finally come to grips with the idea and finally acknowledged it. I started to realize more and more about other things in the JW doctrine that I didn't agree with, and how much it held me back. None of my “friends” called me, and I any sort of 'worldly' friendships were withering due to the fact that I was not allowed to tend and foster to them. I started to realize that if I were to leave, I would be walking into nothing.

I originally set out a plan for six months; at the time it was January. I wanted to be gone before the mid July District Convention, but I was unable to keep up any sort of charade to stay in. I didn't want to have a secret boyfriend, or pretend to be something I wasn't; something I didn't agree with. To me, I felt that was lying, and not only am I terrible at it, but I felt it was immensely disrespectful to my parents and those who still put a belief, even if false, in that religion. I tried, really I did. Yet, I could not do it. Meetings and service were unbearable; I was picking apart nearly everything they said – I saw nearly every lie and logical fallacy they used. At first, it was amusing; I could tear articles, talks, most doctrine to logical pieces. I knew about logical fallacies and what they were from school and in my studies, I used to discourage myself from applying them to the JW doctrine and publications. Whenever I did this as a young teen, I would rationalize, yet again, that “I am imperfect” and my own personal individuality and intellect was unmeritable and untrustworthy. After it stopped being amusing, it started to become increasingly scary; logical fallacies are not hard concepts to understand, were other people seeing these issues with the doctrine? However, the cultspeak, one-mind, one thought pattern masked any outside inkling of serious doubts or disunity among the members.

I started skipping a few meetings and attending local LGBT meetings at both a community center as well as the group at the University I was attending. I met so many accepting people. So many people who had similar stories, so many great, wonderful people. I was upset. I was hurt. I was told that these worldly people are “unhappy” and only exist to hurt people; I found more acceptance there at the few LGBT meetings than I ever did at the Kingdom Hall. There, people actually accepted me for who I am – not the idea that I am one of them. I saw functioning, longtime gay couples in happy stable relationships. It really brightened my day; I was always told that because these relationships don't follow “God's Theocratic Arrangement”, that they would never work and would be destined to fail. Yet, the couples I had met had strong, happy, successful relationships. I started to realize more and more that I had been lied to. If not outright lied to, but been raised up in a place where they operated on extremely outdated and intentionally ignorant information.

My meeting charade was falling apart, fast. As I said earlier, I could not physically take sitting in the meetings. I would often intentionally zone out, on my phone, or out in the parking lot for “fresh air”. I remember my last time in field service – the gentleman I was working with was a Pioneer; and he was so frantic and upset about getting his time and not getting “punished” that it almost seemed like his so-called life-saving work was secondary, at best. I remember knocking on a door, about to go into my presentation; and then it hit me - “Kevin, you don't even believe the shit you're selling.” I started to

cry. I got in my car, and left the territory early. I drove around for a short while, and I made my resolve to leave. I knew that I was not going to last another six months.

But, I knew I would lose everything.....I had no outside friendships, basically a few Facebook friends who I passively talked to every now and again, but nothing real. I posted in a few online automotive forums, one in particular for a long while, but not many people in the real world. I felt incredibly trapped; I could leave the cult, but doing so would leave me in a vast void of total nothingness. What was I to do? I obviously couldn't ask my elder father or any of my JW friends and family; they would automatically default to reaffirming and "encouraging" me to stay within the cult rather than actually talking to me as a person to help me with what to do next.

At my wits end, I went to my old High-school counselor. I had been graduated for two years now, but she had always helped me with advice on College in the past. She was the closest thing to anyone in authority I remotely trusted. I walked in her office one day in early February, and uttered the sentence "Hi. I'm stuck in a cult.". She laughed. Then I explained everything I was theoretically faced with, the shunning issues, the stance on higher education, and everything. Taken aback, she even started to realize why other Jehovah's Witness kids made seemingly nonsensical decisions in the past. She pointed me in a few directions to at least start getting assistance on what to do next. I started to tell others about what I had experienced, the LGBT groups were the first, and then I even told the online forum; some members I had even met in person. I was at the end of my rope; I had literally no one else I could contact, and these seemingly distant relationships were my only saving grace.

I knew I had to come out to my parents and family about everything, my sexuality, and my issues with the Jehovah's Witnesses. I knew this wouldn't be well received, but I had to at least try, correct? I started to even think, well maybe I could come out and maybe they'd receive it well! Maybe things would be OK. However, I later learned that this would not be the case.

I came out of the closet via Facebook. I was friends with many Jehovah's Witnesses as well as many non JW's I had gone to school with. I wanted everyone to know, and I didn't want anyone to talk me out of it. So about 7pm only a few minutes before my "Family Worship", I posted this on Facebook

""Dear Facebook Friends.

I realize that most of my witness and those religious friends friends will defriend me and I am hereby starting an inquiry into my character, but

I am gay. I have been gay for quite some time, and I am tired of hiding it.

If we remain friends, maybe our relationship will deepen. If we don't, I understand totally."

Then, about ten minutes later, I sat my family down and explained to them.

Simultaneously, both my cellular phone and my house phone exploded with calls. I ignored a couple; most of the people calling (namely my brother) were concerned for my mental health and state, something I still find quite offensive. I acknowledged my immediate family first, I wanted them to get things off their chest.

"Are you sure? Well, how do you know?" Asked my mother. There was nothing I could say to that, since I knew she would not understand. My father started to flip through his bible to attempt to

find scriptures to “help” me. I attempted to answer their questions with grace, but it started to gravitate towards my then-nonexistent sex life. They asked me “heartfelt” questions, if I had been with a man, if I had a boyfriend, the things I was doing on line. Still, one of the most pervasive things I have ever experienced; no I hadn't really done any of those things, yet they asked me them in such a manner that made me seem like some sort of spiritual criminal.

My oldest brother, an elder, comes by during this process. He and my dad, ask me if I had considered the branch's information on “homosexuality” in my youth. I told them, respectfully, that I found those articles to be ignorant, insulting and degrading. I was instantly greeted with a knee-jerk reaction of “no it is not, the Governing Body loves you and understands what you're thinking and going through” and more scriptures. I started to realize that I was not going to win.

I halfway expected them to say that they didn't approve of “homosexuality” and that they found it disgusting, but what I didn't expect them to say was for them to tell me that “Gay does not exist.” There is no such thing as homosexuality. I was not prepared for that at all. It baffled me, and then the more I thought about it, the more it enraged me. They equated all of my feeling, all of my desires to simply me being controlled by Satan and wanting to have sex with a man. There is nothing else to it, according to them. I, as my brother put it, wanted to have oral and/or Anal sex with a man. Nothing else. And with that note, I knew that there was nothing else I could say.

And so, I came out at the same time, all the doubts and issues, and lies I had found about the “truth”. And with that, I went from being looked at with condescending concern, but now I was a contemptuous servant of Satan, an Apostate who wanted nothing more but to break God's laws and live a life of moral debauchery. I was called worldly, by my family. I was looked at with a certain fear for my life, since my coming out ultimately means that I was not spiritually sane, and possibly mentally sane, either. I saw them do the mental tap dances and backflips in their minds in refuting the few contradictions my psyche had managed to remember to ask about. My sources were invalid, according to them. I was a naïve child, who had been deceived by Satan himself. And telling others about what I had seen, means that I was a liar, as well. And I had a sick feeling, that there was nothing I could do, nothing I could say to change their minds.

My father told me that he was going to step down as an elder, since he was “not taking care of his household”. He blamed himself, although I told him not to, for my sexuality. He quoted some scripture about how he is directly responsible for his family. There was nothing I could do otherwise. During this chat, I told my family that I had no intention to stay a Jehovah's Witness, due to the fact that the doctrine didn't agree with my conscience any longer. With that note, I was told from birth, that the second that we decided that we did not want to “serve Jehovah” that there was no place for us at home. When I uttered the sentence “I do not want to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses” initially, my parents tried to convince me otherwise. When they realized that they could not do so, I was then asked to leave. I no longer could stay there. I started to realize that I had just gotten rejected by my family.

On facebook, I got numerous letters from my non JW friends of support. However, from my old JW friends, I didn't get much support.

"Hey we still love you bro. Appreciate others concern for you but dont listen the worldly views in those comments man. I know you know that. But just remember to pray to Jehovah to help you to sort things out. - And quite honestly I don't think you're gay man. You might think you are because you may be attracted to guys but one of the Awakes helped us to appreciate that that's all linked to hormonal changes within our bodies that makes us feel that way. This happens in our age range and some

witnesses think they're gay because of it but that's not always the case. But just pray to Jehovah about it which I already know you will."

"Hey Kevin. I saw your facebook status this morning and was curious if you were serious or if you were hacked? let me know friend."

"Hey Kevin, how're you doing brother? I noticed your post on Facebook and desired to ask how you were handling your feelings and the way others may have reacted to your declaration? I hope everything is well with you and your family. As a friend, I wanted to share an encouraging article with you from the JW site: <http://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/family/teenagers/ask/pressure-to-be-gay/>. I want you to know that I'm praying for you as I do for all my friends, and that I'm here if you ever need somebody to talk to."

"Hey hun let me know if you need me and yes i still love you veryvery much"

"Are you gonna talk to the brothers about this? Are you even going to stay a witness?"

"Kevin, I just seen your status, But you are not gay, there is no such thing, you know that, please pray tho Jah about your weakness, it is not worth dying and being dead forever, there are plenty of people in Jehovah's organization that has these tendencies and are doing well in fighting them and keeping it at bay, they know in the New World Jehovah will fix this, They are doing well, they didnt give in,, PLEEEEEAAASSEEE Pray and get help from the elders, Jehovah want you to come to him about your problem and He is willing to forgive if you did something and be merciful, But dont Give in,,dont give in,, I love you so much,, Please Pray, And seek help, Live forever!!!!" (as a side note, this "sister" messaged one of the few JW's who showed support urging him to not speak with me since I am bad association, almost the exact same time she sent this message)

"I would never judge someone for a feeling they have. We're all imperfect. Jehovah knows we're imperfect. That's why he's patient with us. It's our action that counts. What we do. I just want you to know I still care about you as a friend. Jehovah still cares about you as a person. I just hope you make the right decision in the end.... I'll keep you in my prayers"

I went to sleep that night in my bed, but I knew that I had to be gone very soon. I no longer felt comfortable in my own home.

I was in total shock. I thought that maybe, just maybe, that they'd be my family and they'd understand. I was viewed as a spiritually and mentally insane person who they were in the process of casting out. My suicidal thoughts; according to them, they were irrelevant. They didn't matter. It was my fault, I wasn't praying enough or putting enough "trust in Jehovah". Everything I did was wrong. I had "worldly" reasonings – and it scared them. I didn't mean to scare them, but I couldn't lie to everyone anymore; pretending that I went along with everything. I was viewed as a foreign demon, another worldly person to be destroyed, I felt almost inhuman. Like shit. I packed my clothes and possessions in my car. I didn't really own much, just a few meeting suits and some "modest" clothing, and after work, I didn't come back.

While at work, I started to get more and more phone calls and text messages from "friends". 10 of them, told me to have a nice life. I work at a car dealership, and I was taking calls and texting in between driving around vehicles in inventory. My own brother, talked to me on the phone, and after

when I said I was not coming back, the issues I had with the doctrine, he told me that he “would not tolerate rivalry with Jehovah, and to never contact him again”. I was working at the time when I received that text message. I pulled over on a side street, and cried for a long while. I had literally got cut off from everyone I knew in only 24 hours. I had a phone full of contacts that I no longer could call. I felt alone. I was terrified. I thought about going home, but I knew that the conversation would not be real. It would be of them trying to “help” me, and that both enraged and disappointed me. Do they really think I am that stupid, so incapable of forming any decision on my own? How condescending! I didn't know what to do.

I had originally found a roommate, but it didn't pan out. My dad ended up calling, and I told him I found a place to stay, but it ended up falling apart a few minutes after I hung up the phone. I looked around, I had literally no one to call, and it was getting colder and later in the evening. I drove around for a short while until I finally decided to stay in a motel for the night. I knew that this would not last for awhile – it was expensive and would only get worse the longer I stayed. I had no place to stay, no friends to call. I was clueless and scared, paralyzed with fear. I couldn't cry, I was too scared to cry. I woke up the next day and stumbled to class, but I was a nervous wreck. I cried in my car before I went to work.

None of my roommate situations were panning out, and after two days in a motel, my credit card would eventually hit its limit. I thought about going home, but I still wasn't sure if I was even welcome there. Still totally cut off from my family, I walked up to a workmate and explained to her everything I had just gone through. I had no other options. None of my LGBT friends were in a position to help, and I had only known them a few days, how could I ask them for something of this magnitude? What was I supposed to do?

She invited me to stay with her for the weekend. I knew I had at least a few days as to where I could at least sleep in relative comfort and find a place to stay. I was still terrified, my head was buzzing since my life had changed so rapidly, so quickly. Only a few days earlier, I lived at home and all was well. But because of a few words, I was now looked at as disgusting and a sinner to be destroyed. Hated. Luckily enough, she was able to find me a reasonably priced place to stay, and I would be able to move in nearly instantly. I finally could stop worrying about where to go. I didn't have many possessions, just some clothes and a cheap air mattress, but at least I had a place to stay.

For about a week, I didn't hear from anyone. Then I got a call from both my mother and father. I actually physically saw my mother; that conversation is one of the most emotional things I have ever had, and out of respect to her, I won't divulge all of the details. I was told “you're always welcome here” even though she knew it was inevitable that I was going to be disfellowshipped. As it stands, I'm not sure how true this is. I have driven past my old house on occasion; the locks have been changed. I'm not sure if I am welcome there anymore. My father called me; the call was essentially to make sure I was still alive, and to tell me that the brothers would eventually be calling. I was disappointed; here I was, homeless for nearly a week....and they didn't even think to ask of my well being hardly; just to let me know that the brothers were coming for me. I guess they thought that I was having sex. I don't know. I don't care.

Before I got a call from the brothers, I checked facebook only to get this letter from my brother (who defriended me all said and done, I had lost around 120 friends from Facebook in a matter of hours)

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i once considered you my best friend.

And even though you called me two weeks ago with your decision, I still felt that maybe, just maybe Jehovah was still in your heart and you were willing to accept his love, and we could still remain friends.

But then I found out how you felt about my friend, Jehovah god. How you felt about our parents. Our family. Our father-who from all accounts you have shown nothing but disrespect and a seeming hatred for-even though he has done nothing to warrant. Yeah, I'm calling you out on it. It's what a friend does...and a brother does, and I remember a few times you calling me out on the many times I was stupid.

And it is for these actions, that we can no longer be friends.

You have decided to embark on a journey in a world that you feel you know all about. But I have a feeling you are in for quite the shock...it's a struggle for everyone, harder without family. Do you know how much we would have been willing to do for you? I was willing to walk away from my lease in my apartment, give up all of my travel, and have you move in with me In Pittsburgh. I love you so much I would be willing to give up anything and everything to make you happy. But I see now that I what you want, I simply cannot give. What we have as a family, you have rejected, clearly, and publicly.

Over the last few years, there have been many nights that I have commiserated and fretted over your situation-are you happy, are you feeling ok, who's hurting your feelings. I've always felt that I should be able to protect you as your big brother.

I will no longer do that.

And it causes me great pain.

This is a pain like no other. Worse than the spinal tap. Worse than the day i found out i had ms. Worse than when I was so down I wanted to end my life. Knowing that you no longer want to remain in Jehovah's love with the rest of the family and friends is a pain that cuts to my very core.

But because of the love from Jehovah, the friends, the congregation, and our family, I will be ok. We all will. And all we can do now is pray for you to come back to Jehovah.

No more will I send you random text messages about jokes that we've shared for years. No more will I request the latest music so I'm not listening to the same songs from 10 years ago. No more will I call you about movies, pop culture, or television. Don't think that I won't want to, a piece of me will always be yearning for this bond I shared with you. But I cannot because I love Jehovah too much and I love you too much to do that- I know that the only way for you to get right is to follow this arrangement and cease all contact.

I think I can speak for the rest of the family, and all our friends in Pittsburgh and akron-we are taking this stand together. I love you little brother-but I don't you love you more than Jehovah.

Hopefully you'll make the right choice.

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By this point in time, I was so emotionally spent, there wasn't much I could say or cry, or do. I ignored

it and tried to get settled.

I got a call from the brothers. They said they wanted to meet with me, two of them, for loving consul. I originally accepted, maybe I could step down with grace. But then I realized, that this would not be graceful. If I were to go to this meeting, I would have to agree with them. I don't agree. I can't agree. I find most of what they teach to actually be repugnant. And I know if I say this, they will think less of me.

So I didn't show up.

I got a call a few minutes after it was supposed to start. They stressed the fact that they only wanted to give me some "loving consul" but I didn't agree. I simply told them, "I am going to do what I am going to do....and no one is going to stop me. I love you guys, and my number will always be the same". As if they hadn't heard me, the true motive of the meeting came out. They almost instantly deflected and said "Does this mean you no longer wish to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses?" Although this was true, I was disappointed in the brothers, any sort of compassion was a veneer to get me to agree, to say something, to get me out. Even if they were doing it in my best interests, they defaulted to their 'protocol' and didn't really care about me as a person. This was a bitter pill to swallow...these were brothers who had watched me grow up, and now they seemed incredibly cold. They wanted to me to put my disassociation in writing, but I felt no need to do so. I had left, I had left on my own terms and as far as I was concerned, what I gave them was plenty.

However, that wasn't enough, and I got a call from three brothers about two weeks later. They asked if I had changed my mind, and yet again, respectfully and cordially I let them know that I had no intention of staying one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Then the tone changed from "loving" to damning. I was sure to be destroyed, and the door of the Ark is closing, etc. By that point, I had had enough, so I hung up the phone mid sentence without saying a goodbye. I tried being respectful, but evidently, that was not enough.

So starts the silence of my family and friends that takes me to today. I am attending college still, and I feel smarter, I have more drive, I have more passion. I'm even physically smaller; after coming out of the JW's and coming out about my sexuality, I lost several clothing sizes. I have seen my mother and other family members on the street since then; they refuse to acknowledge me. I wave. I smile. I think about them every day, and I will never stop loving them. I just wish that they'd see that what they are doing is a fucked up sense of love. This is hateful. But I don't even know if they're allowed to listen. And that hurts. It hurts a lot.