

Norman Rockwell was wrong.

By Johanna Thompson

In my tiny northern hometown, there were only two types of people: Protestant or Catholic. Not gay or straight. Not black or white.

But no gays. Or so we all presumed. Wrongly, of course, as the inevitable class reunions bore out. So how does a straight woman from an improbably vanilla background — shaped by Norman Rockwell himself — fit into a considerably more complex present?

Quite comfortably, it turns out, precisely because of that little border town. Diversity was there for the taking; though many didn't partake. Just 12 miles north lay the exotic province of Quebec; 20 miles west sat the Mohawk reservation. And 40 miles beyond the "rez" was Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Still, no one was out of the closet in our town and it didn't occur to anyone to open that door to look in.

I met my first lesbian at Brigham Young University (don't even ask how either of us ended up there!). Nancy was a beautiful, self-assured Bostonian. Her parents had sent her there to straighten her out. It didn't work. She's still normal.

So is my cousin. We were driving to a family reunion and he blurted out: "You know I'm gay, right?" I remarked that I had figured as much. He continued: "How surprised do you think the family will be if I bring a boyfriend to the reunion?"

"About as surprised as they'd be to see me bring home an eligible husband," I replied. We laughed. Made a pact to find boyfriends before the next reunion. Moved on to the next topic. No big deal.

That's the point, isn't it? No big deal. What IS a big deal is that while I may overcome my fear of commitment and actually marry, my college friend, cousin and countless others don't have that option. Yet.

Hopefully sooner rather than later, my cousin will bring his husband to a family reunion. I, however, still reserve the right to go stag.