

Outright Radio
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The “eX Files”

From PRI Public Radio International it's Outright Radio. I'm David Gilmore.

Diane Amos: "...And straight America has pretty much lost its mind. Because straight America has a 50% divorce rate. 50%! And they don't want gay people to get married. Why not? They can take at least a page or two from the gay book as far as I'm concerned. (pause)

DG: Well today on Outright Radio...Stories of breaking up in the gay community and what we do with our eX's when the lovin's over. We're listening to a clip from comedienne Diane Amos...

Have you ever talked to gay people who broke up? Well...is this your ex? Yeah we were together 8 years. But we broke up and still share the same house which is really great. And we only share the bedroom. Her and her new wife have it on Mondays and Tuesdays. And then me and my new wife have it on Wed and Thurs and then we kinda commune on Friday and Saturday. And it's great b/c her new wife is my chiropractor and it's so convenient and of course my new wife is her podiatrist which works so well at the new household. Oh My Gosh straight people don't even know. Gay people don't know how to break up! What is the gay reality tv show? Please leave my ass! Just break up. PS take your damn cats! What would it be?"

In today's show we'll hear the story of Jenny & Renee negotiating for turf after their breakup...

We'd been living apart for about two or three months, seeing each other once or twice a week at the practice sessions and recreation basketball team. One night as we were leaving the gym Renee told me that she intended to bring her new girlfriend to the next game.

Later on Kim Ficera examines the demise of a lesbian relationship...

In a series of motions that border on cult-like ritual, a scorned lesbian opting friendship over separation follows a well-trodden path laid out by all of the dykes that have suffered before her. She mends her broken heart in a forest with a book of poems, a portable herb garden, and an ex three times removed.

And finally, my own story of Patrick – after 12 years we return to the very spot where we met to come to terms with the less than romantic reality of what's left: DG: "how would you define what we are?" P: "I think we're, for lack of a better word, we're friends...."

Oh dear. Well, we hope you'll join us for the next hour as we present these extraordinary true stories from the heart of gay America.

Theme Music

As we face a presidential election where the issue of gay marriage has become both heated political banter and saucy dinnertime entertainment for the masses, all across the land, yes, even in your neighborhood, gay folks are hooking up and having gay relationships. Alas, cut adrift from any societal convention, we are left to our own to create and then also to dissolve these relationships. And we do it in unique ways.

Music

So while America whips itself into a frothy mess over the legitimacy of the gay relationship, today we offer a little respite with a show on gay divorce.

Music

Our first story is about the breakup of Jenny Worley and Renee Rivera. When Jenny, a regular contributor to Outright Radio told me that she had just ended an eight year relationship with her girlfriend - I asked her if she would produce a radio piece about it. Her ex Renee agreed to join in and as the piece came together they used the collaborative process as a way of speaking and listening to each other - both about their past relationship, and the one they imagined for their future. Here's their story...

Music

Renee: So, nobody ever says to us now, "Oh, you two make such great exes!" When Jenny and I were still together we got this all the time - "Renee, you and Jenny make such a great couple." I always thought it was because we are so good looking and well dressed. Jenny, being the analytical one, always thought it was because together, I, in my Rock Hudson butch drag, and she, with her Grace Kelly femme poise, made a perfect simulacra of heterosexuality. Maybe they thought we were about to break into a waltz. But now we don't get the same kinds of compliments for being exes.

Femme Music

Jenny: Renee and I met ten years ago when we worked at the same publishing house in Berkeley. We started a friendship slowly, playing chess together at lunch and sharing our commute from San Francisco, where we both lived. Chess and commuting turned into adventures up and down the coast in my VW van until, a year after we met, we ended up making out in a dark corner of a co-worker's potluck lesbian commitment ceremony. A year after that we moved in together, and aside from skirmishes over decorating - I thought that painting the walls of our apartment pink and getting a leopard print couch would be fabulous, and Renee did not - we got along very well indeed.

Butch Music

Renee: The first major obstacle on the horizon was New Jersey. A few years into our relationship Jenny was accepted into a PhD program in English Lit at Rutgers and moved to New Jersey. After a difficult year of being a bicoastal couple I followed. New Jersey presented its own unique challenges to our relationship. Jenny found it difficult to adjust to a different queer culture, one based much more around monogamous coupled lesbians, than the more free-wheeling mix of couples, singles and poly-amory folk of San Francisco. And for me, as a butch, I was grappling with my complete invisibility in East Coast lesbian culture, along with my first confrontation with real homophobia in the New Jersey college town we lived in.

All these forces put pressure on our relationship. Finally they all came to a head with an ill-fated vacation...

Thunder.

Renee: (If I) had to pick a moment it would be that horrendous trip to a... to Chincoteague (laughs) the last summer we were in new jersey we had a horrible horrible horrible trip. And um...

Jenny: And there was a hurricane to sort of manifest just all of the internal ...

R[talking over]: there was a hurricane... it was one of those trips where just everything goes wrong we went with each of our respective little sisters to (laughs) Chincoteague and then we were camping and a storm blew in while we were away at dinner and soaked our entire campsite and it was all soaked.

J: and we came back and our tent was in a tree!

R: we packed everything up and put it on top of the car all sopping wet and drove about ten miles and the car died (laughter) and we were just by the side of the road in Maryland some where waiting for the triple A and I was just like I don't think this is going to work (laughter) it was so awful.

J: I know I can't believe I just laughed about it actually because it was horrible at the time.

R: at the time we weren't laughing about it but it was sort of the moment for me where I was like this might not work out.

J: yeah

R: this might not work out that it was like it sums it all up because that particular situation was so horrendous that it wasn't clear that it wasn't just all the circumstances and the environment. But one of the things I think I learned in New Jersey and at that moment was that when things were bad we somehow couldn't really help each other

J: yeah

R: like then that was where I think I mean there's a lot of reasons I think it's hard to point to one but I think that's what I learned in New Jersey is that when things got bad we just didn't either of us have it in us to like come together and make the best of it? For some reason we just got worse when things were bad and I think that other couples I don't know because I haven't had this experience but maybe other people kind of come together and make better of a bad situation but we weren't able to do that. When it was a bad situation it was even worse somehow. (I would suggest tightening this up a bit) I don't know if that makes sense

Music

Jenny: One of my friends was always expressing admiration for the longevity of my relationship with Renee. To her, I seemed more mature, grounded, and sane because I was coupled. But secretly I envied her long line of ex-girlfriends whom she could count on to loan her a pick-up truck when she bought a new dresser, or a sofa to sleep on when she visited them and their new girlfriends.

So when Renee and I decided that it was time to split up, what I was actually kind of excited about was having my first ex-girlfriend. It was going to be great! We would be reliable old friends, bonded forever by our years as lovers, yet somehow instantly living our own separate lives full of interests and buzzing with activity. I pictured our future bond in snapshots and sound-bites: she would help me move; I would help her paint her apartment; we would confide about new relationships and buy each other drinks over break-ups; she'd come over to watch Buffy the Vampire Slayer on Tuesdays (since I'd gotten the TV in the break-up). My picture looked like one of those cigarette ads from glossy magazines -- people together, happy, casual, laughing, and perhaps grilling burgers on the backyard barbeque.

Music

But like the friend on the respirator who never gets invited to the Benson and Hedges barbeque, my own less savory emotions were there, just beyond the edges of my good intentions. We'd been living apart for about two or three months, seeing each other once or twice a week at the practice sessions and games of our little parks

and recreation basketball team. One night as we were leaving the gym after practice, Renee told me that she intended to bring her new girlfriend to the next game. I was angry because this was my turf too, but also because Renee was forcing me to deal with the fact that I was no longer number one in her life. In spite of my objections, when I arrived at the next game, the new girlfriend was there in the bleachers, and there she sat, made-up and coifed, while I sweated on the court, dirty hair falling in my eyes and bruises on my shins. At one point during the game, I tripped and fell smack on the floor right in front of the new girlfriend in her lip gloss and sexy sweater. The rest of my team ran down the court after the ball, and I could hear the new girlfriend cheering, "Yay, yay!" Okay, I realize now that she wasn't actually cheering about my fall, but as I struggled to my feet with dusty smudges on my face and clothes, I thought to myself, "It wasn't supposed to go like this."

Music

I now understand-why other people preface their divorces by having secret affairs, developing drug problems, or conducting blow-out arguments that end with one person's belongings being thrown onto the sidewalk. By filling the relationship with discord and anger, they force upon themselves the separation they need. We'd tried to break up without the drama, but it just didn't give us enough space. We needed that wedge between us to make the separation real. So after a particularly contentious post-game argument, Renee and I decided not to see each other for a couple of months.

Music

R: in some ways because we've been together so long and have known each so long that in some ways nobody knows me better and that's something that is really really valuable to me. Ah... But it's been it's been difficult to get back to the place where we can be friends um initially

J: It's been almost exactly a year since we decided to move apart and we live in the bay area so of course it took me months to find an apartment um once we did decide that so it's true it's only been 7 months or six months that we've actually lived apart and the first few months of that were not weren't automatically friends. And I think that we both recognized that that wasn't going to happen that we needed to have a separation for there to really be a psychic kind of split one from the other and um we continued to play basketball together on the same league team and over the winter time and enjoyed that but it was the site of tension because I didn't really want to see your new girlfriend and um and I wasn't really ready for that yet and you can say yeah we want to be friends but there's still a lot of laundry to do I think.

R: yeah

J: we have to really work out the gap between what we'd like to be, which is really akin to I guess to function the way that we all dream that a family would function I think, to be supportive and um unconditional and help each other move and help each other when we're sick and to do those things that for each other that that you really have to be family to do um because for me my family of origin doesn't really function that way you know I need to make that. Um but there's a gap between my desire to have that with Renee and it actually manifesting.

Music

J: When Renee and I met again after a few months apart, what was most surprising and a bit frightening for me was how little it felt like there was between me and this person I had lived with for so eight years. Without a house, or kids, or even pets to squabble over, it seemed like our relationship had left very little trace on my life. When I first met her for lunch, for example, we chatted and caught up, and while it was pleasant enough, I felt as if we should set an empty place at the table for something that was missing -- maybe the intensity of passion or just the comfort of a shared domestic life.

But when we actually talked about it, we gradually started to see that, even though there wasn't a lot of material or visible evidence of our years together, we'd both gained a lot from the relationship:

J: I remember someone I mean people (tighten up) I've had to tell my friends sort of one by one that we've split up and um I didn't send out a mass email or anything like that it's been (laughs) it's been a slow process and sometimes I forget that I didn't someone and they're shocked (clean up mistarts) but people will say things like oh I'm so sorry that that didn't work out or I'm so sorry that that relationship failed. And I I've always said well it did work out and it wasn't a failure. We were together for 8 years and so something worked out and and I came away from that really enriched by being with Renee and by everything I've learned I learned so much from you. and I I by no means would say would look at my life and say that oh that is a place where I've failed my relationship with Renee, no way, that was a success to me.

R: um-hum

J: Um and I think that to some extent it seems like the need to deem a successful relationship as the one that lasts until you die is kind of inversely proportionate to your ability to value the ex relationship I think because it's almost like if were going to say oh the monogamous couple is the way for everyone to go um to death do you part then we almost have to um erase those other relationships that so-called didn't work out you know we have to eject those people from our lives and you don't really see so much

R: Um for me it uh the relationship (clean up stumbles) my relationship with Jenny is was my first real relationship uh even though I came out um to myself and my family uh when I was sixteen I never really got in to uh any real relationships I dated but I was basically single for a long time and um so it was my first adult relationship and I can't even begin to say all of the things that I have learned from the relationship and from you um one of I think one of the first things that Jenny taught me was really good manners (laugh) um Jenny's a real etiquette expert (laughter) and I was raised on communes and I would say that all of my good manners now are really I owe it all to Jenny..

J: really?

R: and I'm known for having very good manners

J: oh my god who knew? (laughter)

R: so um (laughs) but on a more serious note um (pause) Jenny was the person who taught me that I was lovable that I could be (pause) like that I could be (pause) loved.

And that was the hugest thing in my life, I mean it's it's really (pause) that's a major thing. Um, that's the greatest gift anybody's really given me.

Music needed for breathing space here.

J: Last week I went to Renee's 35th birthday party at a neighborhood biker bar with picnic tables out back and a barbeque. I spent the previous day making her an apple-bourbon cake and icing it with praline caramel sauce. Old and new friends and most of our basketball team showed up to drink pitchers of beer or bloody Marys and eat barbequed ribs. I'd brought my new lover, and after a while, Renee's latest appeared too. That this event was presaged by sun rather than a hurricane, and that I did not fall on my face while the new girlfriend cheered seemed to me good omens that our relationship might be approaching a new place, perhaps somewhere between that stormy road trip to Chincoteague and the glossy magazine of my imagination.

Jenny Worley and Renee Rivera in San Francisco who both recommend collaboration on public radio pieces as a highly effective form of therapy.

Music break

Our next story comes from writer Kim Ficera, author of *Sex, Lies and Stereotypes*. After her last breakup, Kim, didn't exactly have the same utopian lesbian community fantasies that Jenny and Renne did. Here's her story...

The most difficult part of moving on with my life after I broke up with my last girlfriend was avoiding bumping into her and her new girlfriend, a woman who I feared enjoyed all her teeth and wartless skin, despite the many curses I'd wished upon her. Living in a small town with my dread and paranoia, I'd expected them to ambush me at the local Gap, or even in the supermarket. I'd convinced myself that on the day my ex hurdled a frozen food case just to bushwhack me, she'd be one remarkably sane and downright lighthearted lesbian — happier than she'd ever been with me.

In my nightmare, I won't recognize her at first, because her new babe has talked her into wearing a black cocktail dress. She has on lace underwear too. The type that accents the cleavage she'd once thought too feminine to expose. She looks hot, damn it. Too hot! She's the Anti-Ex — the ex from hell, overeager to publicly humiliate me.

Glowing with newfound confidence and independence, she announces over the loudspeaker that the mess in aisle three — that's me — has some growing up to do. Then she tells me to my face that she never thinks about me with longing. In fact, she haughtily reveals that she never thinks about me at all. She's over me, completely and without regret. She's moved on to that spot in the store where she stands imperiously, with one hand on her babe's perfect bottom and the other on a camera aimed at my face to capture my humiliation. She shoots, I go blind from the flash, fall down, hit my head on a display of canned peas, and die.

So, when I actually saw them smiling at me in a checkout line over twenty-six miles from our homes, I prayed, to no avail, for the morbid comfort of that fantasy.

Music

Damn it! Sometimes I wish I were straight. When straight people divorce, finality is decreed with the bang of a gavel. After court papers are signed, photos destroyed, and children and pets distributed, all that remains is pure hatred. No birthday cards are ever again exchanged; no phone calls made later "Just to say, hi." The marriage is over. In fact, it's so over that if both parties are Catholic, they can file for an annulment. If that annulment is approved, the mighty hand of God reaches out from the heavens and wipes their messy pasts away with a huge, divine eraser, declaring that it was never a valid marriage in the first place.

On the contrary, when lesbians break up, God isn't summoned. Despite the depth of our wounds, we realize that we alone are accountable for our lives, and, more importantly, we know that beyond our tears lie futures full of new, exciting experiences, free of the people that made us miserable.

Well, some lesbians know that. Others live in a queer vacuum that demands the past dictate the future. They choose to remain friends with their exes. In a series of motions that border on cult-like ritual, a scorned lesbian opting friendship over separation follows a well-trodden path laid out by all of the dykes that have suffered before her. She mends her broken heart in a forest with a book of poems, a portable herb garden, and an ex three times removed. The poems give her spiritual strength and wisdom; the herbs, healing nutrients; and the ex from long ago is asked to tag along because, well, that's the least she could do.

Although thought foolish by some queers and nearly all straight folks, the process of suffering in the company of someone you've previously suffered from is, apparently reinvigorating. In less than a week, the once broken-hearted and fragile lesbian returns from her sabbatical chipper, whole and ready to pardon all who have wronged her. Eager to forgive the unkind words said to her and the lies told just days before, she races directly to the softball field in the park, where she greets her ex at the backstop with a thermos of hot green tea and a smile. There, before an entire team of dykes all too familiar with the scene, she absolves her ex of all past wrongs, confesses that she still loves her, but doesn't want to have sex with her anymore, and finally asks, "Can I borrow your catcher's mitt next weekend?"

Dykes like her have honed healing and reconciliation to a creepy science.

I'm nothing like that. Nothing, I tell you.

Music

So, back at the market, there they are — my ex and her new girlfriend — smiling at me over a basket of groceries. Anyone watching would have thought our meeting benign, but I felt assaulted. I was mortified — so embarrassed that I had to fight an impulse to cry. I'd wanted to be sporting a brand new babe of my own — a model, a musician, or an artist. I should have been buying filet mignon and wine for a date of my own, not French fries and ice cream. And, I certainly didn't want to be caught wearing the sweatshirt that she'd left at my house the last time she'd slept in my bed — you know the one, you might have one just like it — the one that smells like her.

I couldn't bring myself to be charming. I wanted revenge. I wanted blood, but would have settled for sweat. So I considered smiling while saying, "Oh, hi. I didn't expect to see you two here." And while the flawless new babe remained appropriately terrified that I might clobber her ridiculously beautiful head with the gallon of fudge ripple in my basket, my ex might reply, "Oh, we were just picking up something for dinner." And then I might say, "Oh, no. That's not what I mean! I heard you two were having problems."

I know that every couple has problems, and every couple with problems is always concerned that everyone else knows their problems. So, wham! They'd shoot each other the who-the-hell-did-you-tell? look. I'd then mercilessly fan the spark of a huge fight with my pity. "I'm so sorry," I might say. "Commitment is so very hard, and compromise is equally challenging!"

I'd feel vindicated, but I'd hide my enthusiasm. "I really, really hope you work it out," I'd say frowning. Then I'd pay the cashier and stroll guilt-free away from the mess I'd made.

While exiting the store, I'd turn to see them arguing. I'd smirk victoriously, thrilled to have played an instrumental role in their messy — very messy — breakup. But in the parking lot it would occur to me that their argument might provide them with a great excuse for make-up sex — which is almost always hot. So, I couldn't do any of that.

Instead, I inquired politely as to my ex's health, nodded to her babe, and ran to my car, where I hyperventilated while a geezer sucking on a cigar in a truck next to me watched me suffer through a cloud of smoke.

I cried so hard that I couldn't see my key meet the ignition. The old man saw, though. He couldn't take his eyes off of me. At first, I thought it pathetic that my pain might be his mid-afternoon entertainment — more enjoyable than *One Life to Live* or *All My Children*. But I couldn't blame him for staring; I was really a mess. Besides, he looked rather sad and needy, as though he watched just to prove to himself that he hadn't cornered the market on pain.

I calmed myself by remembering that I'm young; I'd fall in love again. Being single only sucks until you're not single anymore. Everyone knows that. So, I was sure I'd survive my ex's betrayal. Soon I'd again believe that I'm a good person, deserving of love and respect and, well, you've watched the Lifetime Channel, you know the rest. But it didn't happen that day. That day was for self-pity and mourning.

Music

Okay, so I'm a wimp.

That's what my gay male friends tell me, anyway. More than once they've reminded me that they never run crying from their exes. They might dance around them, wave them off, burn them with lit cigarettes (accidentally, silly) and make fun of their shoes, but there's no running. That, they insist, is for women with cleats.

Suffice it to say that men are visual creatures; women, emotional. Gay men want their exes to witness how quickly they recover, lesbians pray for a decade of mutual pain.

Music

As I drove home from the market, I tried to envision a future full of endless dates with fabulous women. But instead I pictured my ex kissing her new love, a woman with a face that only a lobotomy will remove from my memory. I imagined them squealing later that night over a bottle of wine, toasting my pain and the apocalyptic zit on my forehead that just might kill me when it explodes.

Jealous and degraded, I drove like Joan Crawford in her movies. I screeched around corners and peeled out at traffic lights, all while searching for a rocky cliff. But there are no cliffs in my town. So I went home, where I ate the banana cream pie they'd watched me purchase minutes before. I stuck my tongue right into the center and lapped up a mouthful. Self-pity doesn't require utensils.

Music

Dykes choose friendship over discord almost every time. Impaired by thoughts of an ex-less future, we can't erase the memories from our minds or the phone numbers from our address books. We can't bear to throw away the shells we gathered on the beach in Provincetown that first summer together; and we keep our Annie Lennox CDs, even though we can't listen to them anymore without crying. Nothing prevents us from hanging on to the women we've loved — not even distance. Exes five hundred miles apart spend weekends in alternating locations, at first reminiscing about intimate times together, and then gradually moving into an eternal platonic dedication to one another.

It's difficult for us to detach from one another completely because our small numbers practically demand that we be not only friendly to one another, but also downright incestuous. Unlike gay men, who seem to procreate at the mere mention of a tea dance, lesbians are few and far between.

It's not uncommon for ten long-time lesbian friends to be connected sexually through one or more women. In other words, not only do those women know each other's exes, they might share exes too. And, because they're all buddies, if one lesbian in the group breaks up with her partner, she not only risks losing that woman's love and companionship, but also risks losing one or more friends. Since neither partner wants to lose friends, they're forced by their social vacuum to remain in contact with one another because they'd see each other anyway — whether they want to or not. So, they might as well want to.

Those lesbians travel and feed in social circles that ensure their survival and allow them to trace their roots. They are the gay world's answer to Kevin Bacon.

But sometimes, even six degrees of separation is too close for comfort.

Music

In search of the sympathy needed to help wash down the comfort food, I called my best friend — an ex four times removed and related to her what had happened. “Look at us, we’re best friends now,” she said. “Give yourself some time, and you’ll be fine.”

That’s not what I needed to hear. So I hung up, dove for the pie crust, and then called my best straight friend, who instead of consoling me said, “Get over it already. Why are you lesbians so sensitive and emotional?”

Without allowing me to answer her question, my best straight friend began the frightening story of her very, very emotional, life — a tale that would give Maury Povich an erection— and I became angry. I wanted the moment to be about my pain for once, not hers. But I let her go on, because I couldn’t get a word in edgewise. I also wanted to finish my pie.

When she reached the part about why, and how, her ex-husband cheated on her with a woman who looks like Sissy Spacek, it occurred to me that she’s single, she’s cute, and I’d always thought she had lesbian potential. So, I wondered, why not ask her over? We could do shots of tequila and maybe even take a bubble bath. Straight girls, I’ve heard, love bubble baths.

But just when I got up the nerve to invite her over, she’d yammered on to the part where she fell in love with the man who would eventually steal her car and a ring she’d received from another moron she’d met at a gun club.

I realized then that we could never have a sexual relationship. I didn’t want to be another link in the chain of her disastrous affairs; I wanted her to shut up. So, I told her I had to go. I lied and said there was someone at my door.

Reluctantly, she agreed to hang up, but not before promising to finish the story the next time I call. I licked the pie pan and said something stupid like, “Great!” and hung up myself.

Alone again with my thoughts and a lap full of crumbs, I decided to call my ex. Our meeting that day had broken the silence of the previous few months, so a phone call wouldn’t appear motivated by anything other than my desire to tell her that it wasn’t as awkward or horrifying as I assumed it would be. After all, I thought, we’re lesbians. I knew we would be friends eventually, so I might as well get it over with.

Writer Kim Ficera who lives with her **new** partner and their 2 cats in Connecticut. You can read more about Kim and her book *Sex, Lies & Stereotypes* at KimFicera.com.

Coming up: My **own** story of breaking up... We’ll be back with more stories of our ex’s when Outright Radio continues... pause from PRI Public Radio International.

1 minute break

You’re listening to Outright Radio, (pause) from PRI, Public Radio International, I’m David Gilmore. You can contact us at Comments@OutrightRadio.org or call us toll-free at 866-OUTRADIO. That’s 866-688-7234.

Now back to our show on breaking up in the gay community...

I've often thought – you know – most straight people just don't get it when it comes to splitting up. Imagine a straight family seated at Thanksgiving dinner with the current wife and kids and the ex-wife and college girlfriends. It just doesn't happen very often. The very term X that is so commonly tossed about implies the cutting out of someone, the deletion of someone's life from a shared personal history. We've all seen it – the man torn out of the family photo album, a rip defining the lines between discordant lovers.

Music begins.

I've always felt that was too harsh for the photo album of my ex, Patrick & myself. I don't think I could ever cut him so neatly out of my life. But once in a while, especially in those moments when my fantasy bubble meets with Patrick's pointy needles of unsentimental truth, when I recall that in recent visits to his house - there is not one picture of me anywhere on display... in those moments, I do ask myself – what's more painful – spending the rest of my life fantasizing about my last great love for some remnant of verity or finally letting go and making a run for it?

Here's my story about the Persistence of Patrick...

DG: It's 2 hours before dawn. I've been awakened by a distant train horn in the desert. I have exactly 5 seconds of being adrift in an existential quandary. 5 seconds before I reclaim my identity, my personal history, my place in life...and my limitations.

While coming to, I launch into my usual psychic reboot:

- 5 Who am I?
- 4 Where am I?
- 3 How did I get here?
- 2 What have I done with my life?
- 1 Where is Patrick?

Then my mind grabs hold and starts up – like an old crop duster. Contact! Soon it will be noisy and sputtering as it takes flight.

Now, in spite of the fact that there's no getting back to sleep when this occurs, I have to say, I love those five seconds of freedom. But I'm especially intrigued by that last question, "Where is Patrick?" The question itself is not all that unusual in my life. What is curious is that it should come as part of the line up of questions...

"Where...is.....Patrick?"

And WHO is this Patrick anyway?

To answer that question, I must first tell you a little bit about who I am.

Music

You see, when I met Patrick in 1991, I was a bit lost. Like the friendly aliens watching from another planet in Carl Sagan's *Contact*, I believe that somehow the message had gotten out that I needed some help. I was at a time in my life when I was slipping into mediocrity, resignation and conformity. I was still unhappily clad in preppy clothes, spending my Sunday evenings ironing my monogrammed Brooks Brothers shirts for the week's work at a large oil company. Feeling loveless, though certainly not lustless, I went to the beach that Saturday many years ago – not making plans for the evening with the hopes of meeting someone different – someone

outside my realm of comfort. Truth be told, I needed salvation. I was having a personal meltdown. And then...someone from another world tuned in.

Music.

So, it's June 6, 1991. I'm napping at the beach on an unusually warm day for summer in San Francisco. Something tells me to wake up. A voice tells me: "Something significant is about to happen, and you won't want to miss it." I accede to the voice and sit up and there he is. Patrick. My first real glimpse of him looking like a EurAsian cross between Huckleberry Finn and Speed Racer. Petit in stature, Tattered clothes, shoulder length black hair and smoky topaz eyes secreted behind his decidedly unfashionable glasses taped up at the corner. I watched him, too fascinated to even smile.

If I stop to consider how Patrick entered my life – almost as if he came from a dream - I suppose it's not surprising that he's now embedded in my psyche... that now, so many years later, he appears in that lineup of existential questions.

Was he, is he, some construction of my imagination? From the moment our eyes met on the beach a dozen years ago, I've been wrestling with myself about the meaning of Patrick.

Music: Tower of Learning from Rufus Wainwright

In 2003, I returned with Patrick on the 12th anniversary of that meeting, to that very spot in the shadow of the Golden Gate bridge to reflect on our past and present relationship.

DG: So wasn't it like right around here? I vaguely remember it being right up there where I met you.

PS: Yeah it was right around here – I remember that big rock, coming around the corner and you were just on this side of the big rock, so it must be right around here somewhere.

Being that this is a show on eX-Lovers, of course you're wondering now, are Patrick and I still a couple?

PS: "not as such"

That's Patrick stating in typically unsentimental terms, his answer to my question.

DG: "how would you define what we are?"

PS: "I think we're, for lack of a better word, we're friends...." Ocean sounds fade out gently.

Over the years of being with each other, the question, "are you a couple?", has been asked more than a few times. The question itself is what I find troublesome. It's a question that I think, is mostly asked by people wanting to explain the inexplicable. People like to have things laid out in nice, neat little packages. "They're such a nice gay couple. They'll spend the rest of their happy lives raising a couple of Jack Russell terriers and acquiring kitchen gadgetry."

Not as such, indeed!

What Patrick and I have now is very unconventional. It always was. But to place it in conventional terminology, we were lovers for 3 years and now we're...well...ex's.

Music

After our meeting that day on the beach, I truly fell for him, like I've fallen for no other. His unique mix of intellect, shyness, vulnerability and ferocity sent me reeling irretrievably, into ecstasy. The fact that he looked like my high school love obsession didn't hurt either. We had many things in common: a love for art and music, and a desire to do what's right kept us always questioning and arguing the meaning of everything. But we ultimately had some irreconcilable ideological differences that, at the time were stimulating...

PS: "...it seemed like you thought that the reason things happened that were bad to people was quite a bit because of their own fault. You were very much into the whole Werner Earhardt EST thing. And I remember sort of calling you on a few points and...yeah, the politics were definitely different."

He was a radical leftist, an activist for peace, no nukes and anti-establishment. I was a conformist working in the belly of the beast, more interested in saving money for the future and starting a good, solid business. We made a valiant attempt to be partners, but the arguing, inevitably turned inward. Living together, being boyfriends was tough. Our differences began to outweigh our commonalities.

We butted heads over practically everything as we spent our angsty late 20s together dealing with 6 career changes between the 2 of us; 4 apartment changes, the death of most of his family and border-line poverty in the dark ages of AIDS when friends were dropping all around us in San Francisco. All of these stresses eroded most of the sweetness that our relationship had to offer as we fled from dementia-crazed landlords, crack dealers and neighborhood blazes. We sold off the components of our relationship one piece at a time – stopped sleeping together, stopped cooking together until there was nothing left. Patrick would sit silently at the table with the New York Times drawn up in front of his face. My heart collapsing, I retreated into dalliances with friends.

And then one day Patrick showed up with a big yellow truck to take his possessions from our apartment. I found myself struggling to breath as I watched the truck round the corner, his small frame barely visible behind the wheel.

Music: American Beauty soundtrack.

We all have those moments in our lives when we can't help but turn away from stinging truth. In those moments, a protective instinct kicks in saving us from some horrible reality that we can't face. Well, rather than face the hole Patrick left in my life, in that moment on the street, watching his truck pull away, I had one of those departures. I upgraded Patrick, right there, in the snap of my brain to mythical proportions. I turned him into the friendly garden elf, the all knowing Buddha, the Green Man, my very own Johnny Appleseed. Someone I could worship, adore and dote on. Somehow this just seemed easier than letting go.

But, ask him how he feels about me? Never one to mince words, Patrick still says in the most ascetic voice possible, "We're friends." No more words or emotion expended than necessary. Nothing that I could possibly hold onto as any tangible form of affection.

When we lived together, I had to push massive earplugs into my ears to mask the sound of his snoring. Just before falling asleep, I used to say to him, "OK, Patrick I can't hear anything now that the earplugs are in. This would be a good time to tell me that you love me, because no one is going to hear it."

DG: It took you a long time to tell me that you love me. PS: Yeah, it's not something I say very easily. DG: And by the same token, I feel like when you do say it you really do mean it. And so I don't ever even question that you love me. I was just being facetious by asking you – of course I know you love me.....PS: you say with a nod and a prompting kind of look. DG: a leading look like OK, Go Ahead! Go ahead. PS: Now would be a good time. DG: Now would be a great time. Everybody's listening. PS: Do you have your earplugs in? DG: No, I have earphones on. PS: Oh ear muffs. DG: Come on. Come on. Everybody wants to hear just how much

you love me. Laughter. PS: making noises. DG: What's that?? PS: Must've been static. Didn't you hear what I said? (Fade out of laughter.)

I'm reminded of a moment when Patrick and I were riding in a convertible on a crisp and cool day in San Francisco. I was riding in the front seat, he in the back. I was fixated on him in the side-view mirror staring out over the vast blue bay as we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge. The statement on the mirror reflected the truth of our lives: "objects in mirror are closer than they appear."

For over 12 years, in the absence of any emotional outpourings, in the absence of any morsels of sentiment, I've had to subsist mostly on faith alone, that Patrick really cares for me.

Music

Before I float off in one of my gargantuan fantasy love bubbles, I think perhaps a little reality check might be in order. I talked to some casual observers about what they have noticed over the years...

Rusty: "...well one of the things I notice – this is going back years to when you first met Patrick –

DG: This is my friend Rusty who knew me long before Patrick arrived on the scene...

was that it wasn't that easy for me or in fact other people who were in our Discovery group to really get to be with Patrick. He was like a wraith and he would appear every once in a while and so there was no way to get any kind of a strong impression on Patrick from Patrick. And therefore all the impressions that I gained and I think this is true for all the others – the Patrick they knew was the Patrick who came through via you. And, one could see that you were taken with him. But it was by no means clear as it never is – when someone's in love or infatuated, it's never clear what it is specifically that draws the person and that was true in your case. It wasn't by any means clear what it was that Patrick elicited in you or why you were so drawn to him and it was only years later when I got a chance to meet you and P in diff't circumstances – both of you together – that I began to get some sense of what your bond was like.

Rusty: "...you're way of expressing yourself changes when Patrick's around. Even more so when you're addressing Patrick or interchanging with Patrick. And again, that's very common with people who are in close emotional relationships.

John: "I completely think that it's not good for you.

DG: This is John.

JB: I think that it's a relationship based on obsession and dependence and that it's not healthy.

DG: John provides the reality check that I don't want. John's is my business manager – he's prone to the practical.

JB: I've only known you 2 together for maybe 3 years. And I've seen you basically suffer through those 3 years around Patrick. I know that when you're with him that you feel joy sometimes and then there are other times where it's just horrible. And when you're not with him, you're constantly thinking about him. And in my book, that's not healthy."

There you have it. Rusty sees that rosy glow that overcomes me whenever Patrick's around. John provides the reality check that I don't want.

And lastly, it would only be fair to ask what Patrick gets out of the deal.

DG: How is it that I've influenced your life? PS: "...Um, I think I've become more aware of the emotional side of life. That's probably been the biggest contribution you've made over the years. DG: Sometimes I feel like I push you too hard, though. PS: Sometimes you do. Yeah. DG: Sometimes I feel like you need pushing. PS: That's also true. Both of these things can be true at the same time. (fade out in laughter.)

DG: Have you always found me difficult to deal with? PS: Yes! You've always been difficult to deal with. DG: Well, why do you put up with it? PS: Because you're not a bad person and that you mean well and uh there's good things to looking at what you have to say, so I actually enjoy it – it's a great learning experience for me. One of the great lessons, I think that I've taken from our relationship – if I had to evaluate what I learned in the course of 3 years together, you taught me how to accept being loved and I've tried to take that into my new relationship and remember those lessons which are difficult but also to apply the other side of that which is how to love in return. And that's something I didn't work on that well with you. And I guess you'd have to ask the new boyfriend if it's successful. Laughter.

DG: Yeah. The new boyfriend. They were together for 9 years but oddly split up shortly after this interview.

Music

Too many friends have come to me over the years bearing that most unbearable question: Is the persistence of Patrick in my life preventing me from moving on to a more mutually satisfying relationship? If only life were that simple. To me, it's not a simple IF/THEN equation: If I were to let go of Patrick then I would find a partner.

The more intriguing question I pose to myself is, How would life have been different if I were able to let go of some of those shattering experiences of my early life growing up gay in an environment of silence and hatred that have left me stuck in this cycle of fantasizing? How would my adult love life have turned out if my high school loves had been given the chance to be spoken, or even acted upon? Like many gay folks, I have a highly developed imagination that got me through many years of romantic loneliness as a child. That fantasy world helped me survive the rejection of my peers 25 years ago and it helped me survive Patrick's departure from my life 10 years ago.

But the bitter irony is that those fantasies now ENSURE my loneliness. It's a cognitive dissonance that I love to ignore...

Yeah, like, what if I COULD go back?

...to neatly rub out those childhood traumas. What if I could resolve that high school homophobia and rejection that has kept me so protective of my heart, caught on a treadmill of pining for unavailable men? If we could rewind back to my high school so that I could have had that sweet kiss with the boy that I desired so strongly, the boy who looked like Patrick who was always just beyond my reach - things would have been different on that day I met Patrick on the beach. (sound of ocean alone) Not needing to continue the fantasy world I lived in, I would have kept on napping. (more ocean sounds) Patrick would have walked right by me. I might have already been in a long-term relationship...

Well... that's not how things turned out. (music: Cranberries' "Linger" begins here.)

It's not 1982 and I'm not in high school any more. Coming to terms with that which I cannot touch, and having to let go of what I never really had in the first place has been instrumental in the refinement of my soul. Life

with and without Patrick has freed me from the tyranny of a life left on autopilot and taught me volumes about growing up.

And you know, I don't iron my Brooks Brothers shirts anymore and I don't work for the big oil company either.

music

And so, maybe in another 12 you'll find me here on the beach with my ex, Patrick still hoping to hear those 3 favorite words in close and luscious succession. But maybe, maybe in 12 years I'll be hearing them from someone else.

Cranberries continues.

That's all for today's show.

ORR is produced in collaboration with KXCI in Tucson, Arizona. Senior editor for our show is Jesse Rose DeRooy. Our business manager is John Brennan.

Special thanks to Richard Szubin, Gillian Kendall.

Standard Credits

DG: OK, well, we don't have all the time in the world. If you're going to tell me you love me, you might as well tell me now. PS: Is this what you want? Laughter.

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