

## Cornfields

So there I was, pantless in a car on the backroads of Iowa surrounded by cornfields, next to a boy I only knew as [Sportsfan99@aol.com](mailto:Sportsfan99@aol.com) and there was a shotgun pointed at my face.

I was in Iowa recently and though this moment with the boy and the shotgun was many years past, I revisit it every time I visit my family. I haven't spent a lot of my life in cars. In Iowa, they are an essential means of transportation; as my house was surrounded by cornfields a half mile in every direction, walking wasn't an option to get anywhere. I moved to Chicago as a teenager and haven't had to drive since, quickly selling my car and eventually, not seeing a reason to even renew my license. So every visit, every car-trip, I remember how very different my life is now from that time.

Iowa is where I was born and raised and that moment on the back-roads, though unassuming, has much to do with my developmental years. I know that Iowa legalized gay marriage but they did that after I left. As if the state as a whole got together and decided, "You know, we don't really have a problem with homosexuals. Just *that* homosexual."

Which makes visiting so scary because I used to go home and go out and only worry about someone putting something in my drink and being dragged to some homicidal homosexual's house to be tortured for days on end making me beg for death because the scars inflicted physically, and mentally, will make me wish I were dead. But it's so much scarier now because I could wake up married.

Iowa didn't use to be so cuddly with the queers. When I was growing up,

homosexuality was a scary, ugly thing to hide. Whereas most teens were able to make out under the bleachers, I was chatting with queers from across the entire state on gay chat rooms. It was the only outlet for gay teens at that time. We hid behind screen-names and 'stats and kept our interactions to anonymous encounters.

Sportsfan99@aol.com and I had nowhere else to go other than these back-roads by my house. We were too scared to divulge our high school, job or even our first names. So we met on a gravel road in the middle of nowhere. A covert operation worthy of a great spy flick: the paranoid protagonist has a secret meeting with deep throat.

We were discussing national secrets, when a pick-up truck advanced quite rapidly next to our own. I kid you not, an older man wearing flannel and holding a shot-gun hopped out next to my window, tapping the glass with the barrel to his gun. The only words I could muster as we gathered our pants from around our ankles and returned them to our waist was, "Is this a set up?" But even in the great spy flicks a double agent would never leave themselves so... compromised.

I was so terrified and not by the gun but by the act. I thought, I wish I were doing drugs. Because I'd rather be caught with coke than cock. See, with drugs, the worst thing an lowan would do is call the cops. But fags, you could get shot. This wasn't based in fact. I hadn't heard of lowans taking to the streets and killing gays like it's the third act of a zombie apocalypse flick but there was a subtext with every homophobic joke or contrary sneer that they were less than welcome.

After years of internalizing this hatred, hiding it and letting it fester, it had little interaction with the outside world anymore.

That fear is more palpable in retrospect. I mean, when I think about it, I wasn't scared for my safety; my life. I was scared that people would find out I was gay.

Trite but true, my whole life flashed before my eyes; like remembering a story or a dream. I saw this timid scared boy growing up to be himself and quietly wondering if it was too late to be someone else. And as the gun was pointed at my face it was like I had the choice I always wanted. The figurative cross-roads before me was one of death or life--a life of being me.

I later found out that the cornfields we currently resided in belonged to this farmer, his wife and two little girls. And last week their farm house was robbed. As he was trying to sleep that night, he saw our car's headlights come to a stop in his field then turn off. And if you thought I was surprised by him, imagine his shock to find two atheists with their pants around their ankles and the fear of God in their eyes.

I can't speak for [Sportsfan99@aol.com](mailto:Sportsfan99@aol.com) but I haven't worried about this whole gay thing since then. The farmer could have told me it was against God's plan and I would have said, "Do you mean to tell me that you got a peek at God's play book and you're driving an 89 Ford pick-up truck? God needs better PR." He could have said, "It's just wrong!" And I would have replied, "Sir, cheese is wrong. Someone took it upon themselves to take the white stuff coming out of a cow's utter and let it get moldy then proceed to eat it. But you know what? It's

delicious!”

I can't say I went home and came out to dear old mom and dad. Or that [Sportsfan99@aol.com](mailto:Sportsfan99@aol.com) and I decided to date. But fate, in the guise of a shotgun gave me a cross-roads on those back Iowa roads.

Cars are in-betweens. A transition. A way of getting from one place to another. And even though I didn't put many miles on that car, it took me a great distance that night. I still wonder, when I sold it, if it would have improved the value for the potential buyer to know what that car and I went through because, even if only through the rear view mirror, I finally understood the value in that car.

Every visit to Iowa, I re-visit that moment in awe at how different I am now, because of or in spite of that night. My family knows I'm gay and I've had just as many healthy relationships as my heterosexual counterparts. But mainly, gay couples having their marriage recognized by the state is and hearing about gay teens, openly dating in high school, I realize how far Iowa and I have both come.