

05.25.06

in

Utah this week



SUMMER SO SOON?

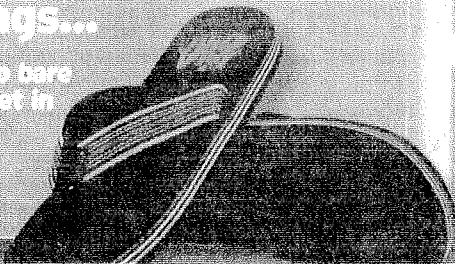
Looking for a summer flick, the perfect fairway or a little culture? we've got you covered.

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Pride was 'key' to man's coming out

BY AMY SPENCER

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Like some gay people in Utah, Jere Keys said he had a Mormon upbringing and a lifestyle that was kept under wraps.

"I was in denial and it wasn't until college that I could do it," said Keys about coming to terms with his homosexuality.

It's a difficult process that happens in layers, Keys explained. "It's rare that one person just overnight decides to come out. The first step was coming out to myself."

Keys was a freshman in college in Reno, Nev., where being involved in theater and having friends who were gay provided an environment where he felt comfortable coming out to friends. "I was out to my friends about a year before I told my parents."

Before coming out to his family he played the "gender pronoun game" where Keys would say he was seeing "someone" or refer to the "person" he was dating. It wasn't until Keys' parents decided to come see him in Reno for his birthday that he decided he would come out to them. And even that wasn't an easy choice. "I could de-gay my entire house that I shared with a lesbian roommate," but that didn't seem practical, he said.

"I took the coward approach and wrote a letter a month before they came

to visit."

Keys' sister already knew he was gay and was living with their parents when the letter arrived. "She called three days later and said, 'Mom and Dad are too upset to talk to you right now, but they are still coming.'"

When Keys' parents arrived in Reno they spent the first night arguing, but "I never doubted that they didn't love me."

It has been nearly 10 years from the time Keys came out and the relationship with his family is still strong. "I am constantly thankful for my family."

A month after coming out to his immediate family, Keys still had the extended Mormon family to deal with. "My cousin had a wedding on June 24 that same year. I wasn't ready to tell the whole family, but they already knew."

The "difficult and trying weekend" was filled with comments like, "you should pray about it," and "you should read your scriptures."

Trying not to steal the spotlight from the bride was difficult and being around the family became overwhelming, he said. "I took a flight back to Reno the next day."

Looking for a distraction, Keys picked up a gay lifestyle magazine for the plane ride. Flipping through the pages of the magazine, he came to a story about Gay Pride Day in San Francisco. Keys showed his friends and joked about going, but then



Amy Spencer

Jere Keys shares his coming out experience that led him to coordinate Gay Pride Day in Utah.

decided to really do it. "What could make this weekend any more exciting?"

"We spent the entire day watching the parade ... right at the sidelines."

Pride Day in San Francisco brings in 2 million people celebrating their culture and for Keys, this weekend went from feeling completely alone at the wedding to feeling overwhelmed with support. "I can't put

into words how that pride event broke me out of a bad mental place."

After returning home, Keys was interested in sharing his enthusiasm. "It inspired me with being open and proud. And also helping with venues for others to find that."

Since that first festival in 1997, Keys has been involved in Pride Day organizations in Reno, Las Vegas and is

currently the coordinator for Utah Pride Day, held June 1-4 in Salt Lake City.

"Everything I have done as an outspoken activist is to help people understand," Keys said. "I object to anyone telling me my life is wrong. I won't pretend to be anything different than who I am, to be morally correct. What is wrong is when people have to lie about who they are."