

SUPER GAY Q AND A

WHEN DID YOU COME OUT?

George Bangs: Well, I had been hanging out with this one guy who was pretty flamboyant and one day my mom just asked me and I told her that he was my boyfriend. And my dad didn't find out until later when one day my boyfriend texted me and my phone was out in the kitchen and my dad had read the text and that's how he figured out.

WHEN WAS THAT?

GB: That was probably like, near the middle of junior year, actually. So I haven't been out too long.

William Thames: I was in junior year too. I decided for myself that it was time and so what I did was that I had five people out of my friends and I took them aside to almost warm up with as they were people I really, really felt comfortable with and I told them each individually until the Thespian Christmas party when I came out to all my friends in one big thing. I have yet to actually come out to my parents. That is what I am planning to do before Christmas break because I have to write my CU essay about being gay and they are going to have to read it. So the point is, at the very latest before college. I am, however 100% sure that they already know and I'm pretty sure the conversation is going to go something like, "Hey I'm gay. "Oh, okay. Great," and I imagine that they don't really give a s***. And I came out at the thespian party pretty recently too, junior year.

Dalton Valette: So I came out in February of freshman year and it was almost an epiphany for me as I was watching this Syfy show called *Being Human* and I saw this guy on the show and thought, "Oh my god, he's really attractive." That's kind of when it just clicked and suddenly everything just made sense to me. And I came out to my friends a little while later and then I came out to my parents about a week after that and they just said, "Dalton, we've just kind of assumed since second grade."

DID YOU KNOW YOU WERE GAY FOR LONG BEFORE YOU CAME OUT?

WT: Yeah, I had known for a long time beforehand. I hadn't really accepted it actually for a while. And, I know this sounds weird, but I was almost holding out hope that it wasn't true. At that point I was thinking, "Well maybe I'm bi. Hell, maybe I'm straight." Because it was a matter of could I see myself romantically with a guy because I could kind of see myself romantically with a girl but could I see myself sexually? So there was that whole thing, so basically I knew that I was gay and then I had to just figure all that out for myself and realize this is what I wanted.

DV: I remember before I fully realized I was gay and I was still questioning, "Well maybe I do like girls." I always tried to imagine myself in a house with a white picket fence living the stereotypical American Dream life with a wife and two kids and I realized that was not the sort of life that I ever wanted to live, or could even really see myself living that life.

GB: I guess I had some of the same things and I had never really been thinking about a romantic future with a girl, so I don't know -- I guess high school sort of helped me start thinking outside of my box.

WHAT WERE PEOPLE'S REACTIONS?

GB: I didn't make any sort of announcement. I told my best friend Antonio of course and it was

good to confide in one person and then I didn't make a big announcement but I stopped hiding it. If people asked I would simply tell them, "Yes I'm gay." And I started dating a little bit and that prompted some questions and it was good to just be honest with people and feel comfortable with the knowledge.

WERE MOST PEOPLE SUPPORTIVE THOUGH?

GB: Yeah, I mean I've never really had to face any homophobic comments or insults about it. WT: I had nothing but love. There was a gigantic group hug at the Thespian party. And what was really good was that the people I really cared about didn't care and they realized that it didn't change me. I was just thinking, "Good, that's how I want it to be. That's what I'm going for here." There were a few people who asked me, borderline inappropriate questions such as, "Well how do you know you're gay if you've never [had sex with] a guy?" And I was just thinking, "Okay we cannot be doing this." I mean, how do you know you're not sexually attracted to a cat unless you've [had sex with] one? So I had a few questions like that and I mean, there's nothing wrong with curiosity and I'm glad I can clear some questions up with people, but for the most part people were really open and supportive with me.

DV: That's just like, I made mine very casual and I told my best friends and I just came out gradually and if it was brought up in conversation I'd just say, "Yes, I'm gay." I never had any sort of ceremony and I had largely positive reactions from people except really from my grandparents. They are both Southern, conservative, religious people and when I told them they took it kind of stoically at first. And then a week or so later they called me and said, "Dalton, we want to take you out to dinner, just the three of us."

And I reluctantly said yes and they took me out and we were driving and driving and driving, all the way to Denver and when we finally pulled into a parking lot, I looked up and saw that the restaurant we were going to was a Hooters. So my eighty something year old grandparents took their recently out gay grandson to Hooters and the whole time my grandma is just saying, "People come here for the food, not the atmosphere," and my grandpa is just drooling over all these fake breasts. So that was their last attempt at scared straight and, I guess you could say it failed, but that was really the most negative reaction to coming out.

SO DID YOU GUYS LOSE ANY FRIENDS WHEN YOU CAME OUT? DID ANY OF YOUR GUY FRIENDS TRY TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM YOU?

WT: At first there was a bit of that. There were a few days right after I came out where I would go into class, and normally they were very up front and conversational with me and there were a few days where they were really austere and I just think, they didn't really know what to do in this situation and I eventually told them, "Truthfully this doesn't, or shouldn't, change anything." But yeah, generally everyone was chill.

GB: I didn't have a big coming out so it's hard to say if there was really any distancing between us. I didn't notice anything.

DV: I don't think there was too much distance with me either. WT: Finding a boyfriend, God. It's so lonely. I swear to God. For me, high school is the time

when you're supposed to be experimenting with finding out who you are and dating is such a huge part of that and a lot of who you are actually comes from romantic experiences. Here it's a little better off, but I think of it as a friend-based community, as there are people here you can talk to about being gay but there are not many people you can actually date. You have to be just brutally honest with yourself: when your numbers are so limited, it's not likely that it's going to happen in high school. So it can be really lonely sometimes and you see your friends hooking up all around you and you just have to think, "Well it's not time for me yet."

DV: It's a very small pool. WT: I know, that's why college is going to be the best!

DV: I thought it was bad because when I came out, two months later I was dating a senior who was gay. So naturally after that when I broke up with him, I was thinking, "Oh wow, there are actually a lot of gay guys. It's going to be fine." And then there was a two and a half, three year streak of loneliness and no one. And then recently I dated this other guy and we dated for two months and then back into loneliness. But definitely, it is incredibly hard finding other people to possibly even date.

WT: But what that comes down to ultimately is, yes, there is the loneliness factored into it, but we are in a community that's a little more on the liberal, accepting side and we could be--

DV: --gay in Mississippi. WT: Exactly. Getting beaten up every day and being called faggots all the time. I have never been called a faggot.

GB: Yes, I feel that we are in a great place. Monarch and Colorado as a whole are pretty accepting communities to be gay in.

WT: More than anything, it's almost comforting. DV: I know exactly what you mean. I was bullied in middle school a lot but nothing in high school particularly after I came out.

GB: Well middle school is just awful. WT: It really is.

DV: Yeah and I didn't even know what gay was and people were calling me that and people just assumed and that was bad because I was called faggot and AIDS f***** a lot and I was pushed up against lockers and tripped occasionally.

And there was one day when these girls poured ketchup into my hair. And I had to go to the bathroom and clean it all out and missed one of my classes because of it. But in high school it was different after coming out as I really noticed there was a lot less bullying.

SO HAVE YOU GUYS DATED ANYONE BEFORE? AND DID YOU DATE GIRLS BEFORE YOU CAME OUT?

GB: I did date girls before. (Pointing to WT) Girls had crushed on you all the time in middle school!

DV: (Talking to WT) Girls still have crushes on you now!

WT: No, I've never dated girls. I have never dated anyone.

GB: I've had four relationships since coming out. So that's good. I would say that I had one girlfriend before coming out.

DV: In middle school I dated a fair amount of girls.

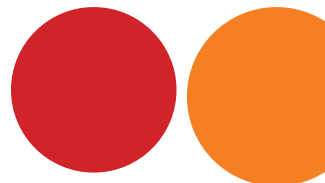
WT: Of course you did, Dalton, you're such a gentleman.

DV: Well then I asked a few of them, since supposedly everyone thought I was gay, I asked

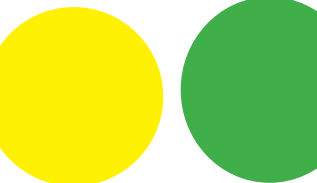
Being in high school is no easy task in and of itself, but imagine what it is like to be in high school and be openly gay. There are many lonely nights and times when you feel like the awkward third wheel. Being gay in high school can be a struggle, a struggle that many straight people may not immediately be able to identify with, but there are openly gay people at Monarch and they are willing to talk and express their feelings about their identity.



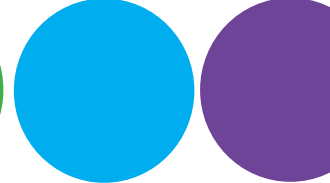
DALTON VALETTE



GEORGE BANGS



WILL THAMES



some if they dated me knowing I was gay, and a few just said, "Yes." And I would ask, "Well why did you date me?" And they said, "I knew nothing sexual was going to happen. We could go shopping, and it would just be fun." So I've dated a few girls and two guys since coming out.

WT: George, still, you're such a stud man. DV: And one of the big things for me, and some people didn't expect me to be gay, is because I'm an avid hunter and I'll talk with guys about guns and going out hunting, and some guys have raised eyebrows because I'm more on the effeminate side and that usually isn't associated with hunters.

IS IT WEIRD BEING IN THE HUNTING COMMUNITY AND BEING GAY?

DV: I've gone to some big hunting conventions in Dallas and Reno and I have gotten strange, almost questioning looks before, but I've never had anyone flat out tell me to get lost.

WT: That's because they're intimidated because you're a grade A-badass.

DV: Oh why thank you. I try my best. Swimming in crocodile waters, hunting a hippo and a lion, you know, just the typical gay guy activities right next to looking at furniture in Macy's.

HOW LONG DO YOU GENERALLY KNOW A PERSON BEFORE YOU LET THEM KNOW YOU'RE GAY?

GB: Well the way I approach it is like, if they want to ask I'll tell them, if we don't reach a point where they're asking about it, then they probably don't need to know in the first place. So I'm not too upfront about it, but it's like totally transparent if anyone wants to know it's there.

DV: I don't go up to people and say, "Hi I'm Dalton, I'm gay," but I'll bring it up in casual conversation, and again I wear a gay pride ring, so you can kind of just look.

WT: If they ask I'll tell them, but it's frankly my business. But I'm totally open about it.

WHAT TYPE OF STEREOTYPES DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH AND WHICH ONES MAKE YOU MAD?

DV: Shopping. It's amazing. I love to shop; it's so fun!

WT: I'm a big theater kid, so that's definitely one I can identify with. I'm definitely part of that, which really did help though because in the theater community it's kind of like, okay, nobody really cares. As far as stereotypes that make me mad, if it's you then it's fine. I don't really see a type of gay stereotype that's wrong, because as long as you're being true to yourself, if you want to put on a rainbow jock-strap and march down the street in the gay pride parade, that's fine. I don't really see any gay stereotype that's wrong in any sense.

GB: I like musicals, I said it. It's just annoying when other stereotypes are tacked on to you.

DV: The biggest one for me I guess is actually the theater one. I say I'm gay and then a lot of people immediately assume I'm the lead in every school play and musical. It's like that's not necessarily true. Then also, "You don't like outdoor activities." I get that a lot: if you're gay "You must hate the outdoors," which I really don't get. I never understood that one.

WT: The one thing that I really hate, and this is coming from gay people and straight people alike, is when they feel the need to speculate whether you're gay or not. I really hate that because it's really insensitive to that person. Does it really matter?

GB: How can you tell from nothing? Although sometimes it is nice to have an indicator.

WT: It's really difficult to tell because there is a certain amount of networking you have to do if you want to have that conversation with them. Like "are they out?" And if they're not, the best thing to probably do is just leave them alone and let them handle it on their own terms.

GB: Yeah, if they feel like you need to know, then you'll find out.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD A SERIOUS CRUSH ON A STRAIGHT PERSON?

(They all say yes)

WT: There's a lot of sitting alone and wondering, "What if?"

DV: I have the twisted idea that sometimes I think "I am so attractive I can make them just gay for ME."

WT: Yeah I've had two serious crushes on straight guys in my high school career.

GB: Yeah and then there are times where it's almost like that speculation over if they're gay that you sometimes overhear, and it's really annoying, but you want to see it, so you start looking at them like "well maybe this means that."

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE STIGMA THAT RELATIONSHIPS HAVE A MASCULINE AND A FEMINE PERSON?

GB: I don't feel that at all.

WT: I used to really prescribe to that idea, but frankly, George, you busted that for me, because I saw some of the relationships you were in and thought "they're both equal, and the idea of who's masculine and whose feminine doesn't really matter. Who cares?" I think it just depends on the people involved. However it works out is fine.

DV: Go for the one you wanna be with.

WHO PAYS FOR THE DATE?

In agreement: Separate checks.

WHO LEADS AT A DANCE?

WT: Taller. The tricky part is that on the outside you may be tall, but on the inside, you're more of a little spoon.

DO YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF FEELING LIKE YOU NEED TO PROVE YOUR MASCULINITY?

WT: I've never had that experience with other gay guys. But with straight guys, it's a weird subconscious thing that I've noticed that I do sometimes. I'm trying to stop because it's really not fair to myself. [Sometimes] you're around certain straight guys, and you feel the need to act a little more straight than you normally would. Like, I've found myself putting conscious effort into being like "okay, do not sound feminine when you're saying this. Maybe throw in a bro at the end of that sentence." I catch myself pretty regularly now, it was mostly when I first come out when I was worried about what the guys in my life think.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF GAY RIGHTS?

DV: I think it's much better than it has been. I think this state now, in the US, is the best it's been since the ancient Greek times.

GB: I feel like gay rights are in a good place and they've got a good momentum behind them. I think it's just going to keep getting better.

WT: [Gay marriage is] heading in the right direction, but until it's legal in all 50 states, I might as well still be a second class citizen. It's illegal in Colorado right now, and even if it was legal in Colorado, it's not worth celebrating unless it's legal everywhere.

Do you have any advice for people that may be questioning or are currently in the closet?

Dalton Valette: I think no matter what, there will always be people who will love you for who you are, and those are the people you want to surround yourself with. If you seek out any of us, we're always open, even just for talking about it.

George Bangs: I think it's best to come out to a small group of people first, like people who you know will support you through the decision. That can help you build up confidence to being more open to everyone.

Will Thames: I'd say coming out is nothing more than prescribing to a label. You are what you are before you come out. All it is is saying "okay, this is what I'm gonna live under now." So I'd say take your time, be really patient with yourself, but at the same time be brutally honest with yourself as far as how much you think you can handle and if you're ready. It's a very personal decision and you ultimately have to make it for yourself.