

3.1 A Mum in a MOM

Jaime, England

I was born on the Sunday after Easter in 1971, also known as Divine Mercy Sunday and more ominously as Quasimodo Sunday, which is a liturgical reference, I am told! It was the year Starbucks and Costa Coffee both set up trading, which is probably apt for this Java Junkie. I share my birth-date with the best Doctor Who, David Tennant, and now appropriately, I'm going to travel back in time.

My childhood was spent in Wales, though I later moved to England. I did not grow up in a Christian family. Though my parents did a great line in Victorian parenting, they were not church goers. My fascination with Jesus and burgeoning faith did not come from Sunday School or family traditions but from a Christian headteacher at my primary school, and later from picking up a free Gideons New Testament and reading it by torchlight under the bedclothes aged 17. There is no logical explanation to my coming to faith – I just knew Jesus was real and the incarnation of God. I started to pray and there began my walk with Jesus.

I have always prayed to Jesus more than God. Perhaps because in those early days of faith, where I was struggling with overwhelming same-sex attraction, Jesus felt like the loving welcomer of outsiders, intervening on my behalf to a more authoritarian God. Or perhaps I had projected my parents and grandparents onto God?

Coming to faith aged 17 was not good timing. I was due to start University in the South of England, where I had previously been looking forwards to exploring my sexuality, at least in word, if not in action. This was 1988, the year the Prime Minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher, introduced Section 28, an act banning local authorities from promoting

homosexuality as a valid lifestyle (much like the laws in today's Russia and Hungary, though without such pernicious penalties). This was a time where it was deeply taboo to speak about same-sex attraction. Even speaking positively of LGBT+-rights would make a person guilty by association and socially shunned. I had spent my formative years in rough and tough South Wales, where homosexuality was totally off the table for discussion. I had no idea that gays and lesbians were supporting the miners in a mining town not far from my home in Swansea. This *minor* did not feel supported at all.

My fresher year at university saw me awkwardly approach both the university Lesbian and Gay Society (Bs and Ts only came later) and the Christian Union. There was no option to be part of both, as both parties concerned made abundantly clear. These two entities were mutually exclusive. You could not be Christian and gay. Everyone knew that. (At this point, I was not aware that I was bisexual or biromantic; I simply oscillated between honesty and dishonesty about my same-sex attraction).

In the end, given the pressure from family and evangelical church friends, I decided to bury that part of me that longed to be held by a woman, and – in the words of the Church of England's desperately ill-informed document, *Issues in Human Sexuality* (1991)¹ – abandoned myself to my 'heterophile leanings' and focused on the opposite sex.

Now I am older and a great deal more self-aware, I understand that I am bisexual. I also understand from experience that bisexuality can be fluid across the lifespan and that it exists on a spectrum that does not only run from left to right in Kinseyesque fashion, in terms of opposite versus same sex attraction, but also along a romantic-sexual intersectional plane. Now middle-aged, I can say with some certainty that I have always had sexual attraction to cisgendered men and androgynous trans or non-binary people. But I do not experience romantic feelings towards cis men. Whereas with cis women, or androgynous FTM trans individuals, I can feel both romantic and sexual attraction. This probably explains

1 Church of England. (1991). *Issues in human sexuality: A statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*. London: Church House Publishing.

why my current marriage to a lesbian feels a great deal more 'natural' and 'right' than my first marriage to a cis heterosexual male.

There is perhaps a little more to my attraction to women, that it would be disingenuous to omit; throughout most of my childhood and adult life, I have experienced a deep and often painful yearning to be held and protected by a woman. At times I have understood this to be a desperate longing to enjoy a dynamic entirely missing from my life (and still to this day) – the unconditional love of a mother. At other times, I have sexualised this longing. Mutual exclusivity is a mindset you get used to in a binary either-or world. Now with age, in alignment with my plurisexual identity, I recognise that possibly the two sets of emotions are not necessarily or always separate, but potentially all bound together in one organic, pulsating desire to be loved, held, and esteemed by a woman.

In the following I am going to chart my growing awareness – and comfort – with my bisexual identity, whilst touching on some of the difficulties I have experienced as a Mum in a MOM (or a Mom in a MOM, for American readers!). For the unaware among you, MOM is an acronym for a mixed-orientation marriage, for example (in my two marriages), a bisexual woman married to a straight man, or a bisexual woman married to a lesbian. It can be an incredibly difficult space to navigate, for both parties, and for this reason, both partners may keep this relationship information to themselves, to avoid adding the misunderstandings of others to their already considerable burden.

A number of secular books are available on the subject of marriages that failed when one partner came out the closet. But these books tend to focus on marriages or relationships where one partner has been closeted and comes out as gay, which usually means curtains to that particular coupling, rather than the more nuanced and complex situation such as I faced, where one partner is plurisexual (attracted to more than one gender, for example bisexual) and the other monosexual (attracted to one gender only, for example heterosexual or homosexual).

I was married to my ex-husband for over 20 years. I first met him at university at the age of 19. We dated for a few weeks, then I ceremoniously dumped him, telling him I had feelings for women and it wasn't

going to work. (This was before I realised having feelings for the same sex didn't automatically make me a lesbian). However, we drifted back together five years later, due to the machinations of a mutual friend, and married in 1996 when I was 25. It was the *Four Weddings and a Funeral*² era of my life when everyone was getting married. I later realised our marriage was more of a funeral – a death of honesty and self-awareness.

The week before my wedding I secretly let slip to my best friend and several church friends that I was having severe doubts, on account of my sexuality. But everyone encouraged me to just 'go for it.' God would be faithful and I was attracted to my husband-to-be, so it would work out. The pastor and his wife from the local Vineyard Church I attended shared a so-called 'word of knowledge' with me, that we would parent many children. Now I recognise that was probably a crude form of spiritual abuse, to encourage me to procreate and keep the lid firmly shut on those pesky same-sex feelings. We *did* go on to have three children, but I am not too sure what hand God played in that decision (which is not to doubt God's goodness, or regret our parenting journey, but rather to be honest about the spiritual foundation of our choice to have three children).

I actually cried walking down the aisle of the large Anglican Church in which we married that sunny September day. People interpreted that as wedding day nerves, which they were to a certain extent. But that didn't tell the whole story. Had I been bolder, I would have postponed the wedding. But I couldn't let my partner, his family, my family and the church down. And I did love him, even found him attractive with clothes on. It wasn't about him lacking in any department, other than the rather indisputable fact that he was not a woman, which he could do nothing about. So I just gulped, took a deep breath and went ahead.

From the very start, the elephant called Jaime's Same Sex Attraction was in the room – living room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, under stairs closet, hell the garden shed. With an ever-increasing regularity, the cycle of falling in love with a woman, becoming romantically but not sexually involved with her (I was a good Christian after all), owning up to my husband, repenting and throwing myself into heterosexual

2 Working Title Films, 1994.

marriage would repeat. At first my dalliances with the fairer sex would be like the Olympics – every four years or so. Then gradually I fitted in the World Championships, the Commonwealth Games, the British Nationals, until it was pretty much the whole time. Despite this, I loved my husband dearly and though he could be difficult to live with (as could I), we got on very well and we had three children together. By throwing myself into family life and anti-depressant meds, I somehow muddled through for the first 20 years of our marriage. The problem was, the dose of antidepressants was getting higher year on year and since starting a PhD on bisexuality and the church, I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with masking my queer identity.

I began to feel really ill at ease walking down the street hand in hand with my husband, even though I loved him. I did not feel heterosexual and began to feel suffocated and lacking in integrity. I would feel insanely jealous if a same-sex couple walked towards me with arms entwined, or engaged in a public display of affection in my vicinity.

The watershed moment came at a gay colleague's wedding. It was the evening reception and the groom and groom were dressed in white naval uniforms performing a dance number, choreographed to within an inch of its life. It was so camp! But whilst the other guests clapped them on from the sidelines, whooping in delight, I ran out crying. I spent the rest of the evening outside of the venue, trying to make sense of my life choices. The embryonic sense of malaise at my marriage was rapidly developing into a fully formed foetus and was about to begin its descent into the outside world.

The decision to out myself in church was taken out of my hands, when my ill-judged liaison with the current church sex siren was unceremoniously dumped in the public domain via a poisonous anonymous letter sent to the Church Council. I have no desire (and no word count) to revisit this painful episode here, but if you want to read how the Anglican Church grossly over-reacted to a bisexual married woman kissing another bisexual married woman of similar age, then may I direct you to my autobiography, 119: *My Life as a Bisexual Christian* (DLT, 2018).

The marital fallout that followed saw my husband stand by me ultimately, but inside – on my more honest days – I knew this was the be-

ginning of the end. In April 2012, I stood on a beach on the east coast and picked up a small smooth red pebble. I clasped it in the palm of my hand and promised myself I would do right by me, whether that involved divorce or not. By the end of 2016, I had left my husband and in June 2018, I met my current wife. In August 2024, I revisited that same beach and picked up another pebble, similar in shape, to represent the resolution of my bi-lemma.

So here I am. It's 2025, and I'm happily married to a lesbian woman. She is younger than myself by over 12 years – not what I had planned. I asked God for an older woman to be my mother-come-lover, and what do I end up with? A petite, younger woman with a disability that means I cannot nestle up in her arms and be held very easily. I play the older, wiser (usually) more parental role. But it works, on the whole. She is clever, she is funny, she is faithful and faith-filled and she is darn sexy. She is also quieter than myself and tames my verbal wildness, when my extroversion threatens to get the better of me in social situations.

People generally assume I am either her mother or older sister, rather than her same-sex partner, when they meet us for the first time. It's the difference in age and body mass, I guess. So I can't really claim to feel suffocated by the misapprehension and misorientation of me as a lesbian, since the general assumption is that I am her mother, older sister or carer! But the more general point is this: unless a bisexual person walks around in pink, blue and purple tricolour knitwear with a large neon sign on their forehead flashing BISEXUAL, they are generally categorised according to the person on their arm. When I was married to a man, I was perceived to be straight. Now I am married to a woman, I have dramatically morphed into a lesbian (when not being misidentified as her mother!). Actually, I was bisexual then and I'm bisexual now. Should we have to dress our identity like insecure teenagers in the 6th Form college common room to be recognised for who we are? Having children tends to lead to an assumption of heterosexuality as well, though thankfully this is becoming less of an issue, at least in the UK and other European countries where same-sex parenthood is legal.

I find myself for the second time in a MOM (mixed-orientation marriage). I am also a mum within a MOM, being a parent to three adult

children. Two of my three children entirely 'get' and accept my bisexual orientation. I do not have a relationship with the eldest of my three offspring, which is a source of great sadness to me. Whilst I do not believe it has anything to do with my sexuality per se, more about my leaving his father (I to this day do not know the actual reason why my son stopped engaging with me nine years ago), it adds to the already painful gap inside of me, created by the absence of maternal love for most of my life, and rejection of me by various other family members. However, despite the painful burden I carry in terms of family rejection, overall I am at peace and feel an enormous sense of liberation in my current situation.

Not only have I met and married a person that I have the full set of romantic and sexual feelings for, I am gradually learning more and more what makes Jaime contented and at peace and thereby available for others. This involves a balance of work, creative activities, and beach walks with my wife. I have returned to some of the activities of my childhood that also brought me peace – knitting (I'm not very good – I call my products *Shitwear*, i.e. shit knitting) and learning guitar and songwriting. I am not that good at the latter, either, but that's not the point! These activities bring balance to my life and knitting in front of a good crime series in particular means I spend time with my wife. Like all offspring of narcissistic mothers (and that's another story for another book!), I have a tendency towards hyper-independence and enjoy my own company. This can make me seem remote, however, and I do not want to repeat the mistakes of my first marriage, where I led a kind of double-life emotionally and romantically.

Hyper-independence allied with an inbuilt sense of anxiety from my childhood (well-disguised by public self-confidence and antidepressants) has seen me leave my salaried role as a lecturer to become a freelance tutor and academic support worker. I just couldn't take the constant anxiety of checking my emails every morning to see which student was moaning or complaining. As any of you who work in state education will probably know – though I do believe this is more prominent in the ultra-student-centred UK education system – everything is *always* your fault as a teacher/lecturer. It's got to the stage now, unfortunately, where a failing student is unlikely to be asked to leave the

college due to concerns around student retention stats, and the blame falls on you for their inability to succeed. Such is the entitlement these days, often a student will simply resort to badmouthing the teacher, even lying, if it gets them off the hook and a pass. As someone who prides themselves on their integrity, but who also suffers from shame and anxiety, this is not a working environment conducive to mental, and ultimately physiological, well-being. I chose to leave it behind 18 months ago, with no regrets. Working mainly in the private and charity sector, I am appreciated for my experience, expertise and personality (most of the time!) and I am much happier.

I also find myself in a progressive and inclusive United Reformed Church with a female minister, who is a great ally to the LGBT+ community, with a trans man as Associate Pastor. I am part of the worship team, preaching and leading services, and also occasionally lead and preach at sister churches in the city. I co-lead the LGBT+ ministry with several others and am Co-Chair and trustee of a large national LGBT+ Christian charity in the UK. I continue to be involved in the European Forum of LGBT+ Christian Groups, where to my delight, increasingly more bisexual believers are attending as delegates.

I am not totally at peace; like anyone who has left a long-standing marriage with children, I carry guilt around that, though I do know I had no choice, as an individual and parent. I still lug around a great deal of pain regarding family rejection, particularly from my mother, brother and elder son. But we all have our thorns and crosses and I am no different.

I believe being bisexual gives you a unique mindset that carries over into other areas of life, giving you a foothold in both straight and queer spaces and those in between. I do not use my intersectional identity and my lack of visible queerness to hide behind heterosexual privilege. My existence between the tick boxes acts rather as a kind of metaphorical shield against the temptation to jump aboard the binary bandwagon of our current culture wars, the constant battle between the red and the blue corners, when it comes to politics, sexual or otherwise. I resist tribalism and believe that zero sum attitudes towards our fellow humans

are the scourge of society today. What links us is always more important than that which divides us.

Whilst being bi is not without its challenges, particularly around identity and acceptance, I would not choose to be any other way.

This chapter reflects the personal experiences, memories and interpretations of the author. Names and identifying details have been changed or omitted for privacy.