

## In Hip Deep

# Example Personal Narratives

### From Young Writers

Here are the opening paragraphs from two stellar personal narratives, which appeared in the book *Hip Deep: Opinion, Vision, and Essays by American Teenagers*. To read the rest of these pieces—and other great examples—you can download the book for FREE(!) at: [http://www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/2013/04\\_writing\\_with\\_purpose/](http://www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/2013/04_writing_with_purpose/)

### August

Della Jenkins

The summer my dad left, it was hot as hell and I picked cherry tomatoes with him in our garden, seeds running down my face. The tomatoes were practically bursting already from the heat and if you touched them a little too hard they would explode before you could even get them to your mouth. My mom spent a lot of time at the pond, she could suntan for hours, but my dad just paced. He always loved the first frost and could predict it the night before from the smell. Autumn fit my dad well. His silvery hair and icy blue eyes seemed to wait all year long for the cold to come. I sometimes think he went crazy that summer from the humidity and all, but that's probably ridiculous, blaming my parent's downfall on the weather.

Anyway, by the time it did start to get cold at night he was gone. The peepers were going insane that night when I woke up to hear the car starting. I remember I sat up halfway in bed and watched the lights disappear down our driveway. I couldn't have been sure it was the end but I could feel it pulling at me and when the car turned out of sight further down the road something seemed to snap in me. I was up and I was running and I didn't stop until the gravel hurt my feet too much to keep going. My mom was standing at the door when I came back but she didn't talk to me and I was glad because I don't think I could have stood it if she had tried to tell me it was okay. She didn't look okay and I hate it when she lies.

The rest of the night I just lay in bed and I listened hard to the darkness. I was waiting to hear an engine and the door closing behind him but I guess I must have eventually fallen asleep. After a month or so he called the house when he knew Mom would be at work and he asked me if he could come see me and I didn't know what to say, so I said yes. Then he began coming to the house every two weeks but he was gone to me. He was gone to me for more than three years. I was blinded by anger that he did not care enough to see me every day, or maybe more that eating tomatoes with me was not enough to hold him here.

## A Coach's Word

James Slusser

When I was a sophomore in high school, I, like a lot of teens, struggled with my sexuality. Being somewhat “feminine” growing up, I was used to the taunting of my peers. I was used to the snickering and name-calling. Over time, I had learned to turn the tables, unleashing a razor tongue on anyone who dared to put me under the microscope. I had become a campus legend as “the gay boy who is too funny to hate.”

But any security that I felt, any safety that I had managed to create for myself, was shattered by someone I never even suspected. One afternoon, as I broke away from PE class roll call, my friend Jenny approached me. She looked distressed.

“Did you hear what he said?” she asked.

“Who?”

“Coach.” Jenny paused. “Coach. He called you a ‘faggot’ when you passed by.”

A group of students gathered around, confirming what Jenny said. I laughed, sure that it was a misunderstanding. They followed me as I approached Coach, his back to me, laughing with some jocks in the class. He turned and looked at me with a smirk on his face.

“Coach, did you...” I stammered. “Did you call me a ‘faggot?’”

“Yep,” he chirped, without pause.

My heart began to beat like a drum. I couldn't believe—or comprehend—that he would confess to such a horrible thing without remorse. The jock boys began to chuckle and whisper. All eyes were on us.

“Why would you say such a thing?” I asked.

He rolled his eyes, and scoffed. Then he stepped closer, until I could feel his breath upon my skin.

“You know,” he began loudly, so everyone could hear. “It's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.”

The crowd erupted after he delivered his oh-so-clever punch line, and his words and the laughter tore into me with a combination of sadness and furious anger. I looked back at my friends. They looked like I felt—stunned, scared and upset. I wanted to run, but I knew I would never forgive myself. I peered deep into Coach's eyes, as he laughed at me.

*James Slusser's essay “A Coach's Word” first appeared in Teaching Tolerance magazine.*