

School Recess

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After class one cloudy day in fifth grade, Mrs. Hall, with her gray hair tied tight into a teensy nub of a bun at the nape of her slender neck, asked me to stay after school when the closing bell finally rang. I liked Mrs. Hall because she chewed tobacco in class. She was always adjusting the little brown pooch behind her lower lip with her tongue while she taught us about literature and drama. She was most certainly a cow girl, working part-time as a teacher while running a large cattle ranch outside town limits.

As all of my friends filed out of the classroom, my parents strode in and sat right next to me. I wondered what I had done wrong. Mom was wearing her pretty yellow dress with big hoop yellow earrings. She was all dolled up, having just left work at the bank. She seemed distant, her face uncharacteristically devoid of her usual beaming smile whenever she saw me. Dad was still in his forest service uniform with his clunky, smelly boots.

Mrs. Hall ushered a pudgy little man wearing a crooked tie and horn-rimmed glasses into the classroom. "Gordy," Mrs. Hall began, "Dr. Fester is here to talk to you about something that has caused some concern for your parents."

In an unctuous voice, Dr. Fester introduced himself as a child psychologist from the State. He sounded like Kermit the Frog. "Gordy, I'm here to talk to you about playing with girls at recess. It's come to our attention that you won't play basketball with the boys and, instead, play house with the girls."

Mom grabbed my hand to comfort me while dad stared out of the window in embarrassment. It was the first time I had ever seen my dad's face turn beet red. He was sweating, and pearls of drippy perspiration furrowed his brow. Fester continued, "Why exactly do you do that?"

"Well," I stated matter-of-factly, "I don't like basketball, and I love playing house."

Fester interjected, "Your father is concerned that you might be a homosexual. Do you know what a homosexual is?" He was having a difficult time looking professional seated with his corpulent legs crossed uncomfortably beneath a child's student desk. I kept watching to see if he might just tip over. That would have been funny.

"No, I don't", I replied.

My mom stood up, grabbed her white leather purse with tears in her eyes, and glared at my dad, "Gill, this has gone far enough. We're leaving now." Mom grabbed me by the arm and marched me out of the room. She turned around at the door of the classroom and spoke firmly to my dad, "Gill you'll never do this again. If my boy wants to play house, he will play house. I might play house with him."

In our household, the topic of homosexuality was never discussed again; my mother simply wouldn't have it. In Mrs. Hall's classroom, my mother made it absolutely clear with the tone of her voice that the discussion was over ... permanently.

While mom explained everything to me when we got back home, dad never spoke of the encounter with Dr. Fester. I always suspected that he must have felt pretty silly. I remember him punching my mom that night, and she fell into our glass dining room table. I will never forget all of the millions of shiny pieces of shattered glass all over the dining room and in mom's hair.

That was the first of many times that my dad was thrown in jail for wife beating. While I often begged my mother to leave my dad, the couple remained married until my mom's passing fifty years later.

Mrs. Hall (Mickey) and my mother bonded over my school recess preferences and began a lifelong intimate companionship. Every time mom and I would go to Mickey's ranch to ride her quarter horse, Phoenix, Aunt Mickey would always have a pot of pinto beans and green chili cooking on the stove for me. Mickey was a lesbian and the best father I could have ever wanted. It was Mickey who gave the eulogy at my mother's funeral. Dad was a mere hologram of a father, whose only purpose was to win bread for the family table and to beat us when we got out of line.

Kevin Buck is incarcerated in Idaho State Prison and will be up for parole in 18 months. He has written for novels in a series, "The Inspiring Adventures of Glo, Drag Queen Detective", while imprisoned for the past 18 months. He is currently seeking a publisher.