

8th grade at St. Michael Catholic school in The Middle of Nowhere, Kentucky. The day had finally come for the legendary “Abstinence Program.” Incentified by a week of free dress, 54 students left religion class for the science lab to learn the most unscientific facts we would ever hear in our 13 year old lives.

A man and a woman stood in front of a sea of maroon plastic chairs as the Catholic preteens filed in, murmuring rumors about what the week of abstinence would hold. None of us would have ever thought about being gay because that was the highest sin. That was the sin Timmy was sitting back in class for, excluded from learning about abstinence since he was already a lost cause. That’s the sin I would soon be guilty of.

I do thank the Abstinence Program for scaring me for the rest of my life to have conventional heterosexual intercourse. I thank it for teaching me the horrors of Sexually Transmitted Infections and the reasons why I would be judged in society if I were to have sex before marriage. But I absolutely do not thank them for trying to shame me for my growing sexuality. By the time I finished 8th grade, I still didn’t know it was possible for a girl to be attracted to a girl, or more accurately, that my Catholic friends who were girls did not have the same “friendly” feelings I had for them.

Fast forward to the summer between my junior and senior year of high school. My girlfriend was coming over that night, and I was frantically googling “do lesbians need to use protection?” I thought back to the Abstinence Program’s words of wisdom, but all they taught us was the horrors of diseases transmitted from men to women. They always focused on the penis. I remembered every single detail of how no one should use condoms because they weren’t safe and semen would slip through anyway and the girl would get pregnant no matter what, but I had no idea to do in a situation where there was no chance of pregnancy. I had no idea if what I was doing would even be classified as sex. According to the Abstinence Program, it wasn’t. Sex was between a man and a woman.

At least 6 of those 54 students are now out of the closet as queer high school seniors, left lost in 8th grade after they discovered that they could still be good, abstinent, Catholic kids as long as they weren’t having heterosexual sex. Of course, that is contradictory in so many ways, but it is what the St. Michael Catholic school class of 2012 was taught.