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Pa. author details struggle with addiction, coming out in her first book

by Robin Kavanagh
EDGE Contributor
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Jennifer Storm is one of 30 percent of lesbians who are either alcoholics or have struggled with alcohol. She began to drink at age 12 to escape the memories of being sexually attacked, and her addiction nearly killed her.

A small-town girl from Pennsylvania, Storm spent most of her young life caught in the throws of drug and alcohol addiction. It made the emotional alienation at home, and the fears she had about her attraction to women exponentially worse.

Storm is now clean and sober after years of struggle, two suicide attempts and intense therapy. She recounts her experiences in her book "Blackout Girl." And Storm hopes her journey and mistakes can help young gays and lesbians and others.

"I wanted to provide a resource for people, and I think the best way to do that is to couple that with speaking about it" she said. "So I definitely wanted to go out into the community and engage people about what I feel are important discussions we ought to be having."

Told through the vivid voice of a teenage Storm, "Blackout Girl" is a book that touches on themes that are universal to most: guilt, denial, hopelessness, pain, ostracism, fear, violation, confusion, shame and depression. She said she wrote the book to be clear and simple so teenagers would be able to read and understand her story at their own level.

Storm added she is both surprised and pleased audiences of all types are able to relate to some part of her story. She said she wanted her account to be, more than anything, real.

"The one thing I did not want to do was to write a literary puff piece about addiction, because I've seen that done so many times; where the author is trying to make addiction so flowery and almost glamorizing it in a way," Storm explained. "To me this wasn't a literary piece of art I was writing. It was brutal, factual account of my life."

Brutal is a kind word to describe Storm's adolescence. She recounts throughout the book how the cycle of abuse reinforced the private hell she was in after she became drunk for the first time, blacked out and was almost raped in the same night. This one event sparked a vicious cycle of turning to alcohol, pot, cocaine and crack. Her addiction led to more nights of getting so drunk that blacking out was the only thing she could do -- and more assaults while passed out and awake.



Jennifer Storm details her struggles with alcohol, drugs and coming to terms with her sexual orientation in her first book, "Blackout Girl."
(Source: www.jenniferstorm.com)

Storm also spent these years in constant conflict about her sexuality. Her body was telling her she was attracted to women, and women were attracted to her. But the people and world around her - whether it was her grammar school teacher who made her stop giving her "secret admirer" valentines, or a close friend's stepfather who chased her out of his house yelling obscenities when he caught her and his step-daughter slow dancing - were telling her she was wrong.

Storm's eventual epiphany that she actually wanted to live, her public coming out - as well the years she has spent in therapy and recovery - have all helped her heal. She said writing "Blackout Girl" brought about a whole different kind of balm for her soul.

"When you're revisiting things from your childhood and from your past, it enables you to heal and kind of mourn things on a much more mature level," she said. "I definitely had moments when I was writing where it was challenging, and I had to walk away from writing it for a little bit and then come back. To truly bring the reader into your experience, you have to go back there yourself."

Storm is now a lecturer who tries to help others through her own experiences. And she is also a positive female role model for lesbians - an accomplishment of which she feels very proud.

"We don't have enough people stepping out and sharing their experiences and their traumas and trying to be a role model in a different way," Storm said. "I think in particular in the gay community alcohol and substance abuse are really significant problems, and they're not ones I think we're putting enough attention toward or that we're providing enough alternatives against."

Storm said she feels turning to drugs and alcohol is a natural step for many who are struggling with coming out and other issues because the party scene remains a dominant part of gay culture. She added she hopes her story will serve as a warning to young people about what can result from getting caught up in substance abuse. And also that there are people and organizations who can help.

Jennifer Storm will present a lecture and Q&A session on Monday, April 28 at University of Pennsylvania's LGBT Center at the Carriage House (3907 Spruce St.), from 6 - 7:30 p.m. She will also be at the Barnes & Noble Downtown Rittenhouse (1805 Walnut St.) on Tuesday, April 29, from 7 - 9 p.m., April 29. Visit www.jenniferstorm.com.

Robin Kavanagh is a freelance writer based in NJ. She has written for numerous publications, including The New York Times, Asbury Park Press, Bergen Record, Parenting magazine, The Aquarian, North Jersey Media Group, and Blogcritics.org among others.

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