Farm Boys
Fellows, Will

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Cornelius Utz

Cornelius was born in 1909 in Buchanan county, northwestern Missouri, on a small farm about five miles south of the city of South St. Joseph, where his father was a horse and mule trader. Cornelius was the youngest of eleven children—eight boys and three girls. He was married for thirty-five years, is the father of two children, and had a career in social work. He lives in a retirement community in Cleveland, Ohio.

I AM DEEPLY saddened by the sociocultural pressure that’s put on homosexual people. We’re human beings and it just happens that the genes worked this way for us. I didn’t learn this until I was practically eighty years old. Internalized homophobia affected my whole life in a sadly deleterious way. I couldn’t happily be myself because I thought if people knew me they wouldn’t accept me. I was afraid I would reveal my homosexuality, so I put the damper on all kinds of self-expression. I wanted to be liked, so I went out of my way to please people. I wanted to like myself, but I couldn’t quite allow myself to do it. This damned internalized homophobia is just godawful, it’s tragic, and it took me a long time to overcome it.

I really feel good about myself and I think I’m a very lovable person, but I still struggle with it every once in a while.

When I decided to come out, I did it with a bang, and the heaviest weight descended from my shoulders. I never felt so free—released from a burden that had been with me all my life. With this release of creative energy, I have gotten tremendous satisfaction out of everything I’ve done, from writing to teaching to playing bridge and creating artwork. I get great accolades for the fiber artworks I produce, and I’m very proud of them. Hell of a long time I had to wait to get those kinds of satisfactions, but thank god they came. I’ve had a productive life and a good life, basically, but I weep sometimes at how much better it could have been had I not been so inhibited, had I had the freedom to put all of myself into learning my profession and creating my early artwork. I feel incredibly grateful that I finally learned to love myself enough so that here in my twilight years I can get tremendous satisfaction out of my artwork and my wonderful relationships.

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The house I was born in was built of logs and we lived in that house until I was four years old—thirteen people in four rooms. My father then built a much larger house that would accommodate our family. We had a long dining table with benches on either side, six kids on one side and five on the other, father at one end and mother at the other. On Sunday mornings when I was a small child, my father would put an extra dollop of cream in his coffee, pour it in a saucer, and blow on it to cool it down, and then, with me in his lap, let me take a sip of it from the saucer. That sweet, creamy coffee tasted so good it made me tingle with pleasure. It was like sucking at my father’s breast.

We had a lovely big fireplace in the living room of the new house, with a circle of chairs around it. One day, I had injured myself while playing and felt I deserved special treatment during my recovery, so I sat in my father’s chair, the most comfortable one in the room. When he came home he was enraged that his youngest pipsqueak son would have the effrontery to be sitting in his chair, so he lifted me out of it by my ear, ignoring my injury. Crying, I started running upstairs and said, “Ain’t you got no sense?” Like a flash, he caught me at the bottom of the stairs and gave me an awful licking—the only one I ever got from him.

My mother liked to have me learn poems or speeches, and she trained me to declaim. She would listen to me go over and over a piece, and instruct me in how to make it more powerful. There were contests in the county, and I won the first prize more than once with my declamations. My father would then insist that I perform at social gatherings. It scared me to pieces to be asked by my father, out of the blue, to get up in front of all those people, but I did it. I was afraid if I didn’t deliver I’d get a whipping when I got home.

I loved it when we had company, because they related to me with great warmth. Once I cried because I couldn’t ride along when somebody in the family was taking the company back home. My mother said, “So you cry when we say you can’t go? I’ll give you something to cry about!” and she whipped me with a switch, very hard, on my behind and legs. Experiences like these deeply affected my ability to be very spontaneous about any expression of feeling. You didn’t have to get those kinds of whippings very often to begin to close up.

Surreptitiously I learned to crochet and embroider from my sisters. I was really quite good at handwork, but I wouldn’t allow my brothers to see me doing it. When I was seven or eight, my mother got a new sewing machine—an old foot-pedal type—and taught me how to work it. I loved to work that machine and would sit at it for hours, hemming sheets and
pillow cases. That was a great help to my mother, because we bought sheeting and pillow tubing by the bolt for that size family.

I learned to ride horseback when I was five or six years old, and from about age eight until twelve I was highly involved in the farm. We had a chunky little Shetland pony—just the dearest thing you could ever know—and I became so proficient that I could ride him at a gallop standing up on his rump. One of my chores was to ride the pony to the pasture and bring the cows in to be milked, then milk them and drive them down the long lane back to the pasture. I would also round up the sheep and bring them to the farmyard for protection from wolves and coyotes by night.

When we harvested wheat and oats, my oldest brother Millard drove the team that pulled the binder, a very heavy machine that cut the grain and bound it in bundles. Because the binder was so heavy, five horses or mules or some combination of the two were required to pull it, with two in front of three. Someone had to ride one of the lead horses to guide them. By the time I was eight years old, I was the chosen one since I weighed less than anyone else. It was a very exacting job. The binder cut a five- or six-foot swath of grain, and I had to guide the team so that it didn’t leave little spaces that weren’t cut. It was a pleasant enough chore for a short time, but a full day of it was hard work. I was always glad when those long, tiresome days on the horse came to an end.

With my little pony and cart, I was the water boy, wearing bib overalls, a large straw hat, and a bandanna tied about my neck to absorb perspiration. I would fill one-gallon stoneware jugs with water, put them in a burlap-lined fruit crate, and cover them with water-soaked burlap to keep them cool. I took this fresh, cold water to the men in the fields as they were loading the wagons to bring the sheaves of grain to the steam-driven threshing machine. Then I would go to the threshing machine and give the men there their water. That cold water was a godsend for those men, working in ninety-degree heat or even hotter, as it was some of those days in late July and early August. They greeted me with joy and pleasure.

My family were fairly strict Methodists, especially my father. He frowned on playing cards, dancing, smoking, and the use of alcohol. And in spite of the fact that we were eleven children, my parents had a good many inhibitions about sexuality. Anything sexual was to be controlled and denied. Once I was in the barn when a cow had a calf. It was incredibly exciting to me, but I was scared to death to let my family know that I had witnessed it, for fear I would be punished.

When I was about four years old, Rindy, our black laundress, came to our house and brought her grandson, Lester, who was about my age. He
was a lively little boy and had an endless imagination of things to do. One day we ended up in the scale house, which was used as a garage for one of our buggies. He asked me to lie down, and he lay down on top of me. We had our clothes on and he was dry-fucking me. It was not unpleasant. He was quite aggressive and in control, and I was very docile in order not to displease him. I liked having kids my own age to play with and there weren't any in the neighborhood. Suddenly Rindy appeared and saw what was happening. She picked up a bridle with long leather reins and gave Lester a whipping within an inch of his life. She didn't say or do a thing to me, but she made it impossible for us to play together the rest of the day. After that, when Rindy and Lester came there were a lot of other kids with him, or Rindy would say, "Cornelius, why don't you ask your mother if you can go over and visit your friend." This younger neighbor kid had nice toys and we would play together, but there was nothing sexual at all. I think Rindy thought it would be all right if I had sex-play with other little white boys, but not with her grandson.

One summer afternoon when I was five years old I was in the cow barn and George, our new hired man, approached me. He patted me on the head and placed his hand on my shoulder, then squatted and hugged me
Part 1. Coming of Age Before the Mid-1960s

"I would also round up the sheep and bring them to the farmyard for protection from wolves and coyotes by night." Courtesy of Cornelius Utz.

gently. It felt good, so I let myself fall against him. We snuggled a bit, then he gently unbuttoned my pants and brought my penis out as if to help me pee, but I didn’t need to pee. Instead, my skinny little penis became erect and he fondled me a bit, producing a feeling I had never had before. I liked it, but I felt a little fear as well. George stood up and took his penis out, asking me to hold it, and I did. It was not as hard as mine, but it felt okay in my hand. I began to feel afraid, so I stopped holding his penis, returned mine to my trousers, buttoned up, and went back to the house. Not long after this, my mother told my sister and me that we should never go to the cow barn alone if George were there. Shortly thereafter, George was gone for good.

In one way or another, I had sex-play with six of my seven brothers—fondling and masturbating each other to orgasm, dry-fucking by pressing against each other. It usually occurred at night when we would be sleeping together, like it was happening in our dreams, and we never spoke about...
it. I slept in my parents’ bed until I was four years old, but when we moved into the new house my oldest brother Millard and I shared a bed. He was seventeen years older than I. Some mornings, he would feel my penis and stimulate me until it got hard, but he would never let me touch his. It was very titillating in a way, but he said, “You really shouldn’t do this.” When I was older, Millard and I had some sex-play together, but I don’t think we ever came to orgasm together because “you shouldn’t do that.”

When I was five or six, I was out in a cornfield with my brother Lawrence, of whom I was quite fond. We both had to urinate, and he said, “Let me see your penis.” As he looked, it got hard and he pulled the foreskin back and cut it a little bit with his thumbnail, saying it looked like it was growing over the head of my penis. He was very tender and gentle with me, but I think that was a bit of sadism on his part. Later, when I was adolescent, Lawrence and I had a number of episodes of sex-play whenever we slept together. He sucked me, but I couldn’t suck him for any length of time—I guess because I wanted it so much that it gagged me. When I was probably thirteen, we had a black hired man. He and I had sex together a time or two, and shortly after that occurred my mother cautioned me that I should not do anything with him. I don’t know how she knew I had done anything, if she did, or whether it came to her attention that he had made out with one of my brothers.

I had suspicions, but I really denied like hell that I was “that way.” I grew up feeling that same-sex relations were immoral, and even to masturbate would cause you to have problems later. I masturbated an awful lot between twelve and sixteen or eighteen, sometimes two or three times a day. I would determine that I wasn’t going to do it again—“I’ll just do this now and I won’t do it again today or tomorrow”—but I was highly sexually stimulated and felt bad about my tremendous sex drive. There were times when I would get extraordinarily hard and almost painful erections as I was riding my horse, and there was nothing I could do to subdue them.

My father had jackasses that were bred to grade mares to produce work mules. He also had a large white stallion for breeding mares to produce grade work horses. I was never permitted to be out there when breeding was going on, and there was a high board fence around the barnyard so that you couldn’t see the breeding from the ground level, but from the window of my bedroom I could see what was going on and I would masturbate. I was highly excited by the animals. When cows are in heat they dribble something, and it would just drive me over the wall when our cows did that. It made me want to get up there and fuck them. We had an old mare who had been neutered and often when I was alone I would stick
my arm down her vagina. She didn’t seem to mind it at all. I tried to fuck her by standing on her hocks, but I wasn’t very successful.

In 1921, my father’s business failed and we lost the farm and everything. Two of my brothers who were renting a farm together let the remaining family move in with them, and we lived there for about two years. During those years, I slept a lot with my brother Lawrence and we had sex-play together. I was twelve or thirteen, and very interested in people slightly older. I was also highly stimulated by a very attractive hired hand they had. It was all I could do to keep my hands off of him. I wanted to play with his penis, and I thought it was just terrible that I had those kinds of feelings. That helped me restrain myself from acting on them.

I left the farm when I was fourteen. A sister and brother had established housekeeping in St. Joe, so we younger children lived with them and completed high school in the city. We had a coach in high school who really turned me on sexually. I loved being with him. He would shower with the rest of us and I would get a chance to see his equipment and fantasize about it. After football practice, those hunky football players would say, “How about a rubdown?” I loved doing it, and I’m sure it was sexually stimulating to them as it was to me. I became very adept at giving rubdowns.

I was highly attracted to a number of guys in high school, but I didn’t dare let it be known. To be a good, sturdy, non-sissy guy, you had to be interested in sports like football and basketball. I really tried to be an athlete because I wanted to emulate my brother Sam. He was the first and only other man in our family who went through college, and he was greatly admired by my parents for doing that. Sam called everybody and his dog a sissy that wasn’t a high-level football player. I really hated football, but I tried to play because it would make me more of a man.

The first time I had sex-play with Sam, I was on the track team in our high school. We had a track meet in Cameron, Missouri, where Sam was the coach. After the meet, he asked if I would like to stay overnight. We shared the bed where he roomed, and he initiated sex-play with me, which I welcomed. When I was in college in Columbia, he came down there on coaching business several times and spent the night with me and we would have sex-play. This was after he was married and had children. He told me that his wife was kind of nervous, like a Jersey cow.

In college, I heard about a biology professor who was homosexual. When I finally connected with him, he took me to a very lovely place in the country, a secluded and protected woodland area. We were enjoying the birds and the view when he put his arms around me, turned towards me and kissed me. That was the first time I’d ever been kissed by a man. He gave me a deep French kiss, which was highly exciting. We hugged
each other a bit and then went to his house. He lived with his mother, who was closeted in the back of the house and told never to interfere when he had guests. We went to his bedroom and disrobed and made love some more. I took his tongue in my mouth and put my tongue in his mouth. I played with his cock some, but I could never suck him without gagging. He always sucked me, and never seemed to expect me to relieve him through masturbation or anything.

He really introduced me to what it can mean to have gay sex. It was an idyllic experience. I would feel ashamed of myself, but whenever I felt horny I would call him and ask if he would be home a little later. He always said yes. To a great extent, this took care of my sexual needs throughout the rest of college. I really think he fell deeply in love with me, but I couldn’t allow myself to feel love for him, because that would make me a really full-blown “that way” person. (I didn’t become familiar with the word homosexual until I was in graduate school in social work.) I denied that I was completely male-sex-oriented.

I enjoyed being with girls, had relationships with a number of girlfriends, and did a hell of a lot of necking. I’m sure they all wanted me to fuck them, but I never could bring myself to go that far. Consciously, I was scared to death I would impregnate them and then I’d be hooked because it would only be honorable for me to marry. I wasn’t in a position to get married; I had no job, no capacity to support a family.

During my college years I carried on a correspondence with Karl, a friend from high school. It was a purely platonic relationship but I cared very much for him and he seemed to care very much for me. I asked if I could stop and visit him on my way to graduate school in New York. He was in graduate school in Philadelphia and lived in a neat little house out in the country with his roommate Ted, a biology professor. When it came time to go to bed, I was assigned a bed in the bedroom with Ted, upstairs, and Karl slept in the bedroom downstairs. Ted made a pass at me before we went to sleep and we had sex both nights I was there. The interchange was kind of electric between us, so that Ted and I developed a really wonderful relationship, and I continued to be a good friend of Karl’s.

During my years in school in New York, I would go down to Philadelphia when I could scrape up enough money to spend a weekend with them. They did wonderful things to entertain me, and Ted and I always had our reunions in the bedroom. After Karl developed a brain tumor and died, Ted would come to New York to spend weekends with me. He fell in love with me and really wanted me to make my home with him. I liked him, and I’m sure he would have supported me if need be, but I just could not allow a feeling of love.
In college, I had learned enough psychology to become more and more concerned that I was homosexual, and I had to restrain myself from telling this to my close friends. In graduate school, we deep-dished into Freudian psychology and my being queer descended on me more and more. About 1936, I decided I couldn’t live with it. I went to a female analyst—I was afraid to go to a male—and had a very comfortable interview with her. I didn’t hold back anything. She said she thought I should have analysis, and she did not think I should go to a woman. She put me in touch with a Dr. Wiggers.

When I told Dr. Wiggers about Ted, he said, “It’s up to you. I think if you continue seeing Ted you’re not going to be able to give this up. I don’t know whether you’ll be able to give it up if you don’t see him, but I don’t think there’s any chance of your coming through with a good heterosexual relationship if you continue seeing him.”1 The next time Ted came to visit, I told him that it would be our last weekend together—that I really wanted to see if I couldn’t work this out. He understood and said we could still be friends, and I said I’d love to be friends with him.

Analyses are never completed, but after five years Dr. Wiggers and I decided we were as far as we could go. I had gone six days a week for the first two years and five days a week for the rest of the time. I continued to see him from time to time to talk about things that were troubling me. He gave me a great deal of confidence in myself, and my skill as a social worker grew by leaps and bounds as a result of my analysis. I feel incredibly grateful for my treatment because it enabled me to function as well as I did throughout the rest of my life. It enabled me to have sex with a woman and enjoy it, and as a result of that I have two lovely children and four beautiful grandchildren. I feel that having children contributed inordinately to my growth and development as a person.

I met and courted my wife while I was in analysis. I no longer had the need to tell anybody I was gay, and I never discussed it with my wife. For a few years we had very good and satisfying sex, but I simply could not control the drive to have sex with men. If ever I was out of town I would pick up somebody and have a one-night stand. None of them were very pleasant experiences because I would be half-drunk. I almost became an alcoholic during my marriage, and I smoked very heavily.

I couldn’t keep up my correspondence with Ted because I felt I would have to explain it to my wife, so I just quit writing and didn’t give him any explanation. He continued exchanging Christmas cards with one of my sisters, and every so often she would report to me what he was doing—that he was in the army in World War II, that he had moved from Philadelphia to Boulder. After my wife died in 1978, I got Ted’s address from my
sister and wrote him the kind of a letter you write to somebody thirty-five years later. I said I would love to hear from him if he felt like it. He wrote an incredibly nice letter back, inviting me to come and see him.

When I went to Boulder for a weekend to visit with Ted, I said I wanted to apologize for how I had terminated our relationship. He said, “Don’t think a thing about it. I knew you were trying to get over it, but I knew you were queer and would always be queer.” He said that it was in the genes and I couldn’t get it out. We had better sex on that visit than we’d had thirty-five years before. I visited him twice after that long interval of nothing, and we had a wonderful visit each time, highly meaningful and exhilarating. I fantasied going out there and living with him the rest of our lives, but I don’t think he wanted that, and I probably wouldn’t have done it. He died a couple of years ago, so that’s wiped out and washed up.

After my wife died, I decided to see what I could find out about the gay community, so I went to the baths on the west side in Cleveland. This was before the AIDS scare. While I was there I found out about Integrity and went to their next meeting.² One member of the group told me about somebody he had met who he thought really needed to talk to me—a fellow named Dave who was married and had a couple of kids. He gave me Dave’s phone number at work, and eventually we met for lunch and talked. He was not happy and he and his wife hadn’t had sex for years. I appreciated the struggle he was going through. He was still living with his wife, who was extraordinarily homophobic, and he didn’t have enough sense to keep quiet about his gayness with her.

To seal our beginning friendship, Dave and I hugged and had a nice deep French kiss. I got a letter from him saying he wanted to see me again, that he had been so excited as a result of our kiss that he had to go to a public restroom and jack it off. So we met again and had incredibly beautiful sex with each other—the best sex with any man I had ever had. He began writing me love letters, and he was the first man I ever allowed myself to really feel love for. We had a sustained relationship for several weeks and then suddenly he got anxious and tried to break it off. I was disappointed and saddened.

Dave and I came together a number of times after that and they were pleasant encounters, but his restraint affected my ability to put myself quite as freely into the sexual relationship. We were incredibly compatible otherwise. He appreciated my artwork, he was a cultured person, we liked a lot of the same things. He played with the idea of getting a divorce and setting up housekeeping with me, and I said if he did I’d come out of the closet. But I finally wrote Dave a letter, saying that I felt he was treating me like a prostitute the last few times, and that I didn’t want to continue.
that kind of relationship. He wrote back and said, "I loved you very much, and I still do, but I can't give up my relationship with my family. I've de-
cided that's the way it has to be. I was afraid that if I kept seeing you I
would lose control of myself, and lose my job and my family." As sad as it
was, it was a beautiful experience, because it left me free to love other men.
I don't hold back feelings of love as I always did before, when I was try-
ing to avoid being a homosexual. I feel a lot of love for other men, whether I
have sex with them or not.

In 1979 I joined the Unitarian Universalists for Lesbian and Gay Con-
cerns. Two years later I was one of the organizing members of our local
chapter, but I was snug in the closet and insisted on confidentiality out-
side our meetings. In 1985 I attended a continental UULGC meeting
in San Diego. Both the gay and straight members of the First Unitarian
Church there were incredibly loving, accepting, and supportive. In that
atmosphere I began to love myself enough to decide I would be who I
was, and I determined to come out of the closet, come hell or high water.
I had not yet gotten a foothold in the gay community and had been fear-
ful that in coming out I might lose my straight friends and then would be
bereft. With my newfound confidence as a result of learning to love my-
self, I felt that if my straight friends weren't still my friends after I came
out, they hadn't been my friends before.

With that resolution, I came out to a friend of fifty years living in San
Diego, a guy who had been in the short course in social work. It didn't mat-
ter to him, and he said, "You're speaking more freely now than I've ever
seen. You don't seem to be holding anything back now, as apparently you
were before." My niece, also there in San Diego, could tell that I was a lit-
tle bit nervous as I was coming out to her at dinner. She reached across the
bale and grasped my hands and said, "Uncle Cornelius, you've always been
very dear to me, and you always will be." I thought, boy, this is not bad!

I wrote a letter to my two children and sent each of them a copy. My
daughter and her husband were very accepting, and she's very interested
in my continuing reports about UULGC meetings and other things. When
I have initiated the conversation with my son a couple of times, he has
said, "It's all right, but why do you have to say anything about it?" He
said he couldn't understand why I chose this, and when I said there is no
choice, it's in the genes, he said, "Well, you had a choice to give in to it."
I said, "I'm sorry, Dave, that I haven't been able to handle this very well
with you. I don't think you've really understood what I've been trying to
tell you. Maybe sometime I'll find a way to make it clearer—I hope I can—
but I may not be able to." He's been incredibly loving and caring and con-
cerned about me, but this is a struggle for him. He may be worried that he's carrying that gene himself and that maybe his sons are too.

I don't have a lover and probably won't have, but I do have some people I occasionally play in the hay with. I have a lot of pen pals and some of them come to see me, so I have a love-in for two or three days. That's the best I can do, and hope springs eternal. It's reassuring to me at eighty-four that I can still get it off with joy. A man in Georgia has begged me to come and visit him. There's something about the foreskin of an uncut older man that turns him on incredibly. But I feel that there should be a real feeling of love along with the sex experience. There's an awful lot of emphasis on just getting it off. That may be pleasurable, but unless you can have a real feeling of love with your sexual partner, it doesn't mean very much.

I'm not in the gay community that much. I used to go to the bars, but I wouldn't put my foot inside one now because I can't stand the smoke. I smoked and drank to take care of stress for too long. That's why I have emphysema. And I got no fun out of being there. By the time I came out, I was so old that none of the young guys would look twice at me. They didn't know how attractive I would be if they'd get to know me. There's a group of older gay men that meets at somebody's home on the west side, but I haven't kept up with them because there was no one there who had any of the cultural or artistic interests that I do. For an ongoing relationship, those things are just as meaningful to me as sexual compatibility.

I've never felt comfortable in the gay community, but I have developed a pretty good tolerance for most gay people. We're all in this together, and if we can't love each other we'd better figure out where we're going to find people to love. The church is my community. It was through my experience with the UULGC that I found I loved myself enough to come out. When I don't show up at a meeting there are a lot of people who miss me, and they tell me so. I'm active on the Gay/Lesbian/Straight Task Force, which is working to combat homophobia in our church. I'm also in a men's group at the church, and I'm very open there. I feel an incredible love for all the members of my men's group and for people in the congregation of my church.

If I'm in a friendship that means anything to me and the person doesn't know that I have a same-sex preference, I will mention it at some point. I haven't really encountered any problems in being out with people that matter to me, and I'm not at a loss for friends. I've got my circle, both men and women. I came out to the social worker who interviewed me before I came to live here, but I haven't mentioned it to anyone else here. I haven't felt it would serve any special purpose. There's a group of men here who
often eat in the dining room together. Every once in a while they’ll make

denigrating statements about homosexuals, and I’ll say, “I don’t know

what’s wrong with homosexuals. They’re human beings like all the rest of

us.” That’s as far as I’ve gone. In spite of their homophobia, I feel a lot of

love for those old bastards.

NOTES

1. The psychiatric treatment of gay men in this era is described in Peter M.


2. Integrity, founded in 1974, is the gay and lesbian caucus of the Episcopal

Church with chapters in many cities in the United States.