

1988. The summer before college, I worked for my church denomination with a group of other teens holding summer day camps for small churches in the PNW. That year, a booklet was circulating among the churches we worked with titled "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could be in 1988." The slim volume presented a list of reasons for the coming Rapture, suggesting that it would be that fall, during Rosh Hashanah. I was smart and, despite my upbringing, not easily persuaded by the "logic" of prophetic reasoning. I was on the debate team, an avid reader of Russian poetry and literature, with aspirations of being an artist. I wore clothes from the thrift store, a short haircut, and listened to what would eventually be called "alternative" music. I wasn't a pushover for Jesus.

Yet, there was a part of me that wondered...



Mom & me.



Every self-respecting evangelical household had a copy of Hal Lindsey's best-seller in the 70s and 80s.



My mom and aunt were considered "in-the-know" by people in our church when it came to the Bible and current events. My aunt had even travelled to the "Holy Land" in the 1960s and my mom was always abreast of the latest conservative boycott or petition. Even though they always cautioned that we would not now the "day or hour" of Jesus' return (Matt 24:36), they sensed it was soon. The Cold War, Women's Lib, homosexuality, legalization of abortion, tensions in the Middle East were all "signs."

Apocalypse. The word strikes fear in a lot of people, as they think about the cataclysmic end of the world. But I'm an Apocalypse scholar now with a PhD in New Testament and even a couple of books no one reads. Because of that, I know that "apocalypse" actually means "unveiling" and that it is used by scholars to describe an ancient genre of literature, based upon its use in last book of the Christian Bible, aka the Apocalypse or the Revelation of John. This is my "unveiling" of growing up gay and evangelical.

My interest in studying apocalyptic came in graduate school, but I already had a long history with apocalyptic and end time thinking. Born at the tail end of 1969, I grew up in an evangelical Christian church in Portland, OR. In which many of the members believed that Jesus' return, i.e. the Rapture, was imminent. My mom was one.

What if it is TRUE

?!?!?!?

What if Jesus really is returning?!?!?

Will I be raptured?

What about the people who don't know about Jesus?

What about my friends who aren't believers?

And, what about college? I really want to go to college. . .

Spoiler Alert: Jesus did not return in the fall of 1988. The anticipated week, the first week of college classes for me, came and went. I don't even remember it now. Presumably, those who were really invested recalculated Jesus' return. They surely had to do it again and again and . . .

I wouldn't say that this apocalyptic non-event pushed me toward agnosticism. I was on my way down the path of critical thought and I just kept moving in that direction.

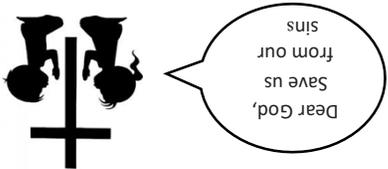
I eventually majored in philosophy, thinking it a more practical track than art. LOL. I began to explore things like feminism and liberation theology, which offered ideas that would push me away from evangelicalism. I also became involved with college groups that would expand my understanding of what it meant to be fully human, including a group dedicated to learning about and educating others about HIV/ AIDS at the height of the crisis.

Being involved with this particular "ministry" (which is what we called almost every group on campus) was my first (known) exposure to queer cultures. Little did I know in 1990 as I was handing out meals to HIV+ folks on a "mission trip" to San Francisco, where we got to see the Names Project and visit Glide Memorial, that I would someday identify as "family." I had no idea as I admired the tall houseless, yet fabulous, Voguer that eventually I would think, write, and teach about drag and religion. These moments shaped me at my core. Oddly, these experiences were given to me because I went to an evangelical Christian college. As we used to say, "God moves in mysterious ways."

Personal APOCALYPSE

Growing Up Gay & Evangelical

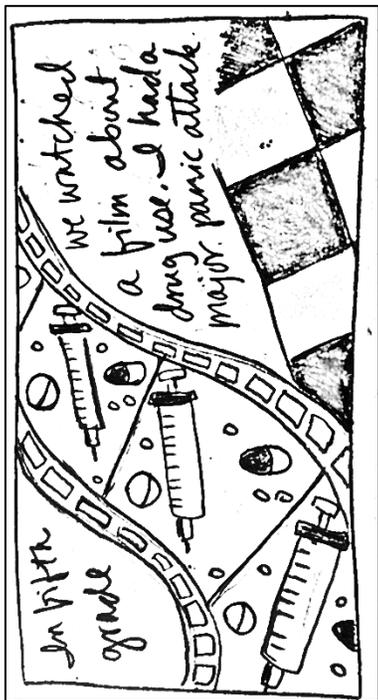
"Neither the day nor the hour."



- 3) Belief that knowledge of salvation is known or felt by the individual believer and not something granted or confirmed by external authorities.
- 4) Belief, at least in my tradition, that holiness is attainable and the goal of the Christian life. "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).
- 5) Practice of public repentance and confession of sins, i.e. giving one's testimony.
- 6) Belief that one can lose salvation, requiring the practice of **re-dedicating** one's life to Jesus.
- 7) Belief that **Satan** is real and actively seeking to lead believers astray through temptation.
- 8) Belief that Jesus will return at any moment to take the faithful into heaven, i.e. the **rapture**.

So, the combination of evangelical belief and OCD made me a ball of nerves as a kid. The beliefs that I was inherently bad and prone to being tempted by Satan fed my OCD and I started having full-blown panic attacks in 5th grade. My symptoms included racing heart, tunnel vision, ringing ears, sweating, nausea, etc.

Among my early triggers were 1) images of/ thinking about illegal drug use, 2) checkered floors, and 3) health movies. Yep. These are strange triggers, but there is some logic to them. I started experiencing panic symptoms during 5th grade, watching a movie, called "Dead is Dead," about extreme drug addiction. I left the classroom, went to the bathroom, which had checkered floors, and fainted.



Some aspects of evangelical religion I personally find conducive to anxiety and OCD:

- 1) Belief that every person has "fallen short of the glory of God."
- 2) Belief that a **personal relationship** with Jesus or being **born again** is necessary for salvation, i.e. not going to hell upon dying.

Just writing about this makes me feel pretty anxious, since it involves revealing things about myself that make me vulnerable. As I write, I must take moments to unclench my jaw, breathe, and remind myself that I am OK. I am OK. I AM OK. Yes, I'm ok. Okay? Okay.

Still, evangelical patterns of belief and practice did not help.

Even though I was an unlikely candidate for hard drugs, I was fearful that they would lead me to hell. Maybe, somehow, I'd all of a sudden become addicted to heroin. None of it was logical, but the anxiety I felt was real and at times debilitating.

Other things would eventually trigger me, like thoughts of sex and especially same-sex attraction, but that's a story for another time.

obsessive thoughts without the stereotypical compulsions, like washing hands. I obsess about moral purity, mistakes, and things like that and my compulsions are primarily mental. I will obsessively seek affirmation that I have not done something wrong or find as much evidence as possible to demonstrate that others have done something similar. I will compulsively apologize. I sometimes have thoughts of self-harm.

My evangelical upbringing, which included a good dose of apocalyptic tendencies toward OCD. I believe my mom was OCD, although in a much more traditional way, so perhaps some of mine is genetic disposition.

Personal APOCALYPSE

Growing Up Gay & Evangelical

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"I fell . . . as though dead."

L. Huber

Anxiety. If you google the words "evangelical," "Christian," and "anxiety," you will enter into a maze of online essays and articles about evangelicals, or ex-evangelicals, who claim some form of anxiety and depression. Some experts have even begun to talk about "religious trauma syndrome," which the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies compares to PTSD. The BABCP links RTS with leaving one's religious tradition, suggesting that for many it functions as a kind of death, the death of one's previous life. I get that, but more traumatic for me, personally, was the tradition that I eventually left.

I do have a diagnosed anxiety order, a version of OCD (Pure O) that involves

