



"True Confessions: Why I left a traditional liberal arts college for the sins of the Big City"

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Jones acted as Executive Producer and Author of the award-winning short biopic RUFUS STONE (2012). This effort was the main output of a three-year project funded by *Research Councils UK* that explored the biographies of older gay and lesbian citizens and their experiences of rural life in Britain. This professionally made film was created by means of a unique collaboration between the film director, Josh Appignanesi (*The Infidel*), and Jones.

Jones' accomplishments have been reported widely in the media, including: BBC Radio 4, BBC TV news, *Times Higher Education*, *LSE Impact Blog*, *Sunday New York Times*, *International Herald-Tribune* and *The Independent*.

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Structured Abstract:

By means of several auto-ethnographic stories (including a scene from a working script for a proposed film), the author interrogates numerous ideas and misconceptions about gay youth, both past and present. A "bargain of silence" sometimes following gay sexual encounters in youth is described. The author recounts a sexual experience with a male college student in his past. This dissonance catapulted the author to move from his small liberal arts college to the city and begin his education again at an Art College.

Jones then describes his personal attraction to a sixteen-year-old boy who lived near his lodgings during one summer's break from Art College. This time, the relationship remained purely platonic, but that didn't seem to matter where the boy's parents were concerned. The author's social position and pretence coupled with his romantic outlook convinced him that anything was possible, even this platonic love. The painful lesson learned that summer was that this was not the case, and



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never would be. The boy's parents threatened Jones, and he never saw the youth again.

The Author continues by discussing his award winning research-based film, RUFUS STONE, and the reactions and conversations following screenings, particularly with youth. This present generation seems to Jones to be a sexually ambivalent one, more comfortable with multiple choices or no choice at all. Nonetheless, these young people do identify with the complexity of feelings and insecurities presented by youth within the film.

In a recent report on sexuality of American high school students by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), researchers found an ambivalence and 'dissonance' amongst youth regarding sexuality and choice. Jones acknowledges that there remains a contemporary problem of genuine acceptance by society, and that there still is work to be done. He also admits that present-day attitudes by youth regarding sexuality are one that he had previously assumed to be historical ones.

Next, a scene from a working script for a proposed film, *Copacetica*, set in the "swinging sixties", is presented. The scene outlines a sexual encounter between the lead character, who remains confounded by his sexuality, and his girl friend. In the scene they have sex, after which they discuss sex itself and their relationship.

Being straight or being gay can be viewed within the wider culture's need to set up a sexual binary and force sexual "choice" decision-making for the benefit of the majority culture. Through the device of the fleeting moment, this essay hopes to interrogate the certainties and uncertainties of the "norms" of modernity by portraying sexuality in youth.

Keywords: LGBT, youth, sexuality, gay, straight, 1960s, life course decision-making

Article Classification: Essay

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Running Heads:

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Essay

***"True Confessions:
Why I left a traditional liberal arts college for the sins of the Big City"***

"At the end of that summer, I went off to a bucolic country college—to please my father more than me. But then, I mysteriously left it all behind for the sins of the big city".

Back at college after a Christmas break, I got together with one of my fraternity brothers, Freddie, for a drinking session in the fraternity president's bedroom. Freddie was the house "bad boy", but also its youngest member, a baby-faced ne'er-do-well, and a teenage rebel, by all accounts. (I must start by admitting that this rap sheet amounts to an attractiveness that still never misses my attention.)

After several hours of drinking, smoking, joking around, we literally landed on the bed, laughing. Shortly thereafter, in complete silence, fumbles, then fondles, began. Then, with a certain amount of misplaced aggressiveness, we got each other off. We zipped up and sheepishly went our separate ways, neither of us saying a thing.

For the next few days I remained riddled with guilt. This was a fraternity brother. Would others find out? It wasn't an act that I was likely to repeat surely, but still I needed a way to be certain that, for both of us, it was just a drunken folly. I finally asked Freddie if we could meet up for a chat. He said, "Sure. Let's go for a drive in my car tonight".

We got together that evening and got into the old coupe banger that he had brought to college from home in Philadelphia. He drove us outside this small central Pennsylvania college town to a country lane shimmering in twilight. Then, at a crook in the road, Freddie pulled the car over into a lay-by, a few bushes and scrubs separating us from the road. He turned off the motor.

Just about to begin my awkward speech about "What a mistake that was/It should never have happened/We were so drunk!/It will certainly never happen again", Freddie reached over and started rubbing my cock through my jeans. My head shot backwards, and I said nothing at all, just a short, sharp moan emanated from my throat.

Within seconds, all of my misgivings and guilt evaporated. We began, once again, our mutually beneficial physical release. It was over quickly, as these things often are for young men just entering maturity. Freddie said nothing, just started the car. The fact that he ground the gears transferring power to the crankshaft did say to me that he was also somewhat unhinged by the strange turn our relationship was taking.

A silent bargain was made between us that night. If it remained unsaid, it didn't happen. If we spoke about it, we would break the spell, admitting to the self-loathing engendered by our encounters. Breaching this strange vow would mean the impossible task of justifying our actions in a very restrictive heterosexual world, the only world either of us knew. This world had taught us this response, this disgust, in a subtle manner, but obviously, had educated us very well. The silence itself from the very outset became the contract between the two of us. This was *Brokeback Mountain* before it ever existed as a reference point. Ironically, it happened in the very same era of that tragic story. The only word for what we were experiencing was found in medical books and considered a mental illness. Disgust and longing, nonetheless, became our personally intertwined dissonance.

Nothing stays the same. Nothing, except our expectations.

1 I had always wanted to go to art school, not “real” college, but my parents insisted. Was going to an
2 art college in the city now a way of getting away from that small college and the impossible
3 situation with Freddie at the same time? Was this move meant to resolve the conflict that our
4 relationship created in my diminutive world? Perhaps I was yearning to go to the big city to pursue
5 my creative instincts at last? Or was I really just headed to a 'den of iniquity' hoping to “discover”
6 my sexuality somehow, all the while pretending that the relocation was for all those other reasons?
7 Over that summer at home, I convinced my father finally that art school was the only education for
8 me. He eventually agreed and off I went to the big city.
9

10
11 Another summer came, the one following my first year at Art College. As it turned out, I wasn't
12 very good at it, art school. The other students were so talented, so sophisticated and me, a hopeless
13 country bumpkin. At least I had started growing my hair so that I would look more like an art
14 student. Or at least I thought so.
15

16
17 Through the school, I met Albert, another student and a local guy with much more artistic talent than me. We
18 rented an apartment together and began a lifelong friendship. That summer, I didn't particularly want to return to
19 my country home and family, and when he said, “I am going to stay with friends in the outskirts of the city for a
20 week or two, wanna come along?” I said, “Yes”. I didn't know at the time that I would end up staying for the
21 whole summer at this house of the parents of two of his friends.
22

23
24 1964 was a summer of love whose soundtrack was Bossa Nova by Morgana King.¹ I slept that summer in
25 an attic room just under the widow's watch of this large grey Victorian house. A veranda wrapped
26 itself around the ground floor like an embrace. A large standard poodle bounced freely in and out of
27 the veranda's floor to ceiling open windows with their tattered curtains. The family's “open-door” relaxed style
28 made the house a gathering spot for local youth of social standing, mostly in their late teens and early twenties.
29

30
31 It was during this time that I became overwhelmingly attracted to a sixteen-year-old boy who lived nearby. We
32 swam together daily in the overgrown garden's pool behind the house, drank beer, listened to music and talked for
33 hours. Our platonic relationship grew daily, as did our desire to spend every possible moment with each other.
34 When his parents questioned this, he innocently told them that he loved me. His mother responded by
35 threatening to come after the family and me with a kitchen knife. Our reverie ended abruptly and we never saw
36 each other again. My social position and pretence coupled with my romantic outlook had convinced me in my
37 naïveté that anything was possible, even this platonic love. The painful lesson learned that summer
38 was that this was not the case, and never would be. It was '[A Taste of Honey](#)'. It was a summer of beginnings,
39 and an end.
40

41
42 When I show our film, [RUFUS STONE](#) (a story of about the youth of two gay men even older than
43 me) to Millennials (and lately Gen Z's), there is always a bit of squeamishness and shuffling,
44 certainly signs of some kind of recognition and/or unease at the conundrum presented by the film's
45 story. In discussions following screenings, this present generation seems to me to be a sexually
46 ambivalent one, more comfortable with multiple choices or no choice at all. Nonetheless, these
47 young people do identify with the complexity of feelings presented by youth within the film. They
48 are also particularly aware of the societal pressures around sexual positioning that are now seen as
49 on a continuum by their generation, if not by society as a whole. The ever-present cultural pressure
50 is to make a choice (is there really one?), but this demand is complicated by their entrenched
51 ambivalence.
52

53
54 I read recently that Prince Harry has actually said, (light-heartedly admittedly). that if it doesn't
55 work out with his current girlfriend, he wouldn't be put off by maybe dating a guy. What is coming
56 back to me, flowing back from these teen and early-twenties audiences—a generation with a very
57 amorphous feeling about gender and sexuality which is very much on continuum—is that they are
58 much more accepting about the idea of change of gender (transgender) than their predecessors.
59
60

1 This generation and the way that they often think about sexuality seems very different in its way to
2 my generation's thinking and previous generations following me. Yet, much of the angst and fear of
3 rejection, even scorn, within the processes of discovery of sexualities, remain very much the same.

4 [In a recent report on sexuality of American high school students by the Center for Disease Control](#)
5 [\(CDC\)](#), researchers found that

6
7
8 some students identify themselves as heterosexual but report
9 having sexual contact with only persons of the same sex, whereas
10 some students who identify themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual
11 have not had sexual contact or have had sexual contact with only
12 persons of the opposite sex. This dissonance is well documented in
13 other research and can be a normal part of the developmental
14 process that occurs during adolescence.
15

16
17 The report goes on to say that

18
19 although 'many sexual minority youth cope with the transition
20 from childhood to adulthood successfully and become healthy and
21 productive adults, others struggle as a result of challenges such as
22 stigma, discrimination, family disapproval, social rejection, and
23 violence.
24

25
26 With the progress made in supposed acceptance of the equal rights of gay and lesbian citizens,
27 particularly in Western cultures over the last half-century, it is easy to assume that feelings of
28 unease, even 'dissonance' around issues of sexuality have been left behind us. Nonetheless, it
29 seems from not only the CDC study, but also my personal experience discussing sexuality with
30 youth following screenings of RUFUS STONE, that this is not the case. Both during the
31 collection of stories from older gay and lesbian citizens, and then in writing the story for the film,
32 the assumption was made (by me at least) that this was a story very much entrenched in the past
33 and that society has moved on. But then in writing the line for RUFUS STONE, "*We all knew, but*
34 *we didn't like to say*" it was brought home for me that I needed to admit that it remains a
35 contemporary problem—a lack of genuine acceptance.
36

37
38 This surprising identification of a present-day attitude regarding sexuality that I had always
39 assumed as a historical one continues to befuddle me. I find certain solidarity with youth,
40 nonetheless, in stories of both insecurities around sexualities and fear of rejection of these important
41 rites of passage. This is why I am writing the next film script. This time, the story takes us back to
42 the 1960s, the time of "free love" gay liberation, and the "sexual revolution" ... or was it?
43
44

45 **Tag: A gullible youth on a roller coaster ride of loss of innocence and coming out in the flux and**
46 **instability of 1960s hippy America**
47

48 "*Copacetica*" is the working title of a script currently in development for a feature-length film. The
49 story expands an earlier A/V production, which has been viewed internationally and written about
50 in academic journals and books.
51

52 Set in the 1960s, *Copacetica's* themes include being different, the celebration of being an outsider,
53 seeing oneself from outside of the "norm", and the interior conflicts of "coming out" within a
54 continuum as a (gay) male in a straight world. These observations are set within the flux and
55 instability of a period of great social change, but which are often viewed in retrospect as consistent
56 and definable. Being straight or being gay can also be viewed in a similar way within the wider
57 culture's need to set up a sexual binary and force sexual "choice" decision-making for the benefit of
58
59
60

1 the majority culture. Through the device of the fleeting moment, the story interrogates the
2 certainties and uncertainties of the “norms” of modernity.

3 To end this essay, I take us back to the beginning. The following is an excerpt from *Copacetica's*
4 working script. By doing so I hope to intrigue you, convincing you to continue to develop this
5 conversation.
6

7 “There are no truths. Only stories.” – [Thomas King, Green Grass, Running Water](#)
8

9
10
11
12 Scene 3. INT. - KYLE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT.

13
14
15 Kyle's apartment, which he shares with
16 his art-school roommate, Albert, is
17 small. A kitchen unit is at one end of
18 the main room, which is also Kyle's
19 bedroom. Kyle's single mattress rests on
20 a piece of plywood cut to size and raised
21 off the floor in the corner by plastic
22 milk crates. Albert has the small bedroom
23 in the back of the apartment. Kyle has
24 created a photomontage of black and white
25 clippings, mostly from fashion magazines,
26 Bailey and Avedon, etc. and glued them to
27 the walls surrounding his bed. Some
28 student art work in frames cover the
29 other walls. Stacked bricks and wood
30 planks form a bookshelf filled with LP's,
31 a cheap stereo and books. A small dinette
32 table with two unmatched chairs is in
33 near the kitchen unit. The flooring is
34 cheap charcoal grey wall-to-wall carpet.

35
36 We see the room in monochrome with the
37 same swimming pool green tone we have
38 seen earlier.

39
40 We hear muffled sounds, the panting
41 sounds of sex. We tour the photographs
42 and artwork, but then move to

43
44 KYLE, his jeans around his ankles, on top
45 of someone.

46
47 WE ARE VIEWING KYLE'S BODY FROM ABOVE.
48 At first we don't know who he is fucking.
49 Slowly we see that it is BILLIE. Billie's
50 mini-dress is around her breasts.

51
52 KYLE lets out a moan, then rolls off of
53 Billie. There isn't much room on the
54 single mattress. It is uncomfortable, so
55 he stands and pulls his Y-fronts and
56 jeans up over his ass and cock. In the
57 meantime, BILLIE has pulled down her
58 dress. They've been fucking in the dark.
59
60

1 KYLE walks to the kitchen area. His naked
2 chest and torso gleam in the dim glow
3 from the streetlight coming through a
4 small window in the kitchen area.

5 KYLE then moves to the wall and turns on
6 an overhead florescent light fixture. The
7 lighting makes the scene greener and even
8 more garish.

9
10 BILLIE feels around the floor next to the
11 mattress for her panties. She pulls them
12 on.

13
14 BILLIE then props herself up, head on one
15 hand. The bed sheets are swimming pool
16 green.

17
18 BILLIE
19 You don't like
20 doing that very
21 much, do you?

22
23 KYLE
24 (Stunned)
25 Wha'? Whoa! (Pacing) Where
26 did that come from? I
27 never said that!

28
29 BILLIE
30 Yeah, but you don't
31 have to tell me; you
32 act like it.

33
34 KYLE
35 It's just that this
36 sack is so cramped.
37 Aren't you
38 uncomfortable? (Beat)
39 Christ, Billie.
40 (Hurt) What a shit
41 thing to say. (Turns
42 away from her)

43 KYLE then turns on the stereo and lights
44 a joint.

45
46 BEGIN SONG: ERIC
47 ANDERSON "FOOLISH
48 LIKE THE FLOWERS"

49
50 BILLIE
51 I dunno. (Beat)
52 (Sitting straight up
53 now) Maybe it's this
54 fucking business all
55 together.
56 (Joking now, seeing
57 Kyle is hurt and
58 trying to make light
59 of her remark)
60

1
2 BILLIE (con't)
3 Let's take 'fucking'
4 lessons! They have
5 love-ins, how about
6 we organise a fuck-
7 in! (Beat)

8
9 I guess that's just
10 an orgy, huh?

11
12 KYLE
13 (Angry) Maybe you
14 just need to be a
15 little less of a
16 snap case, eh?
17 (He still is not
18 over his
19 embarrassment
20 because of her
21 initial question.
22 His ego has been
23 crushed)

24 KYLE paces nervously, putting on a white
25 T-shirt.

26
27 KYLE CONT.
28 (Beat) (Almost
29 talking to himself)
30 Is there more beer
31 in the fridge?

32
33 KYLE moves to fridge and opens it. The
34 light from inside bathes his frame in a
35 flattering light. KYLE grabs two cans of
36 beer, opens them with a church key, moves
37 back to Billie, giving her a beer. She is
38 still lying on the mattress, propped up
39 on a pillow.

40
41 Billie is half dressed now. The greenish
42 lighting makes her look older, a bit like
43 a circus performer. Her pancake white
44 make-up and smudged coal black eyes,
45 which earlier looked so "mod", now appear
46 ghoulish. She is an Egon Schile painting.

47 KYLE takes another drag on his joint.

48
49 KYLE
50 You wanna stay
51 over? Albert is
52 away for the
53 weekend, we
54 could sleep in
55 his double
56 without him ever
57 sussing.
58
59
60

1 BILLIE gets up from the mattress and
2 adjusts her mini-dress. She looks at her
3 reflection in a nearby round, distressed
4 cobalt blue glass mirror, but it
5 emphasizes the ghoulishness of her
6 appearance.

7 BILLIE

8 Nah. I promised
9 my mother I'd
10 spend some time
11 with her
12 tomorrow.

13 KYLE hands Billie his joint. BILLIE takes
14 a toke and hands it back.

15 KYLE

16 Hey! Don't
17 forget your
18 eyelashes! There
19 on the table
20 there.

21 BILLIE moves to the table and picks up
22 the two false eyelashes. They look like
23 two gigantic black caterpillars crawling
24 across the table. She forces them on to
25 her eyelids, counting on the glue that
26 was already on them to hold them in
27 place.

28 KYLE

29 Hey! Maybe next
30 time you can
31 give me a blow
32 job!

33 BILLIE

34 Yeah, right. I'd
35 blow you then
36 you'd blow me
37 off. Not cool
38 and you know it!
39 You sad dudes
40 all alike that
41 way.

42 KYLE

43 Awe, c'mon! It
44 wouldn't be like
45 that. Sock it to
46 me! That would
47 really turn me
48 on! What do ya
49 say? Pa-lease??

50 BILLIE slips on her shoes, straightens
51 her dress and looks in the mirror one
52 last time.

1 BILLIE throws Kyle a distasteful look.

2 BILLIE

3 You're such a
4 dude. You're
5 more into
6 getting yourself
7 off than into
8 getting it on.
9 (Beat)
10 Love ya, anyhow,
11 "Dude".

12 KYLE

13 First mistake!

14
15 BILLIE, moves to the door, blows him a
16 kiss, dramatically.

17
18 BILLIE

19 See ya! (Beat)
20 Probably at
21 Frank's tomorrow
22 night?

23
24 KYLE has moved to the bed and is lying
25 with his hands behind his head, somewhat
26 more relaxed now, toking on the joint.

27 (Is this because
28 Billie is
29 leaving?)

30
31 KYLE

32 Okay, Billie.
33 See you there.

34
35 BEGIN SONG: ERIC
36 ANDERSEN "IS IT
37 REALLY LOVE AT
38 ALL"

39 Love. Is it really
40 love at all?
41 Or something that I heard
42 love called
43 Something that I heard
44 love called.

45 BILLIE starts to exit.

46
47 KYLE

48 (From the bed)
49 Hey, Billie!

50
51 BILLIE at the door, turns back

52
53 BILLIE

54 Yeah?

55
56 KYLE

57
58
59
60

Do you think we
should get
married?

Blackout.

ⁱ An expanded version of this story appeared in “Infusing Biography with the Personal: Writing Rufus Stone”, published in *Creative Approaches to Research*, vol. 6. no.2, pp.6–23.

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