A Separate Peace

David North tells nothing but the truth, so help him God.

May 1, 1996 By Vincent Young

In 1991 minister David North tested for HIV as often as some Baptists go to revival meetings. The family man, replete with house, three kids in the yard and a lie, began to suspect that his secret history of unprotected extramarital gay trysts was about to rear its hidden head. In April North's fears were confirmed. He tested positive for HIV. But that test was simple, unlike the one that thrust him into the public eye. North became the nationally-known HIV positive minister who was prohibited from seeing his three daughters. Internally he struggled to become the man who would finally make peace with God and with himself.

After his test, North was still not ready to completely face the truth, let alone tell it to his wife, Kathryn. "I was afraid to tell my wife I was gay."

Instead, he told her he'd "contracted HIV from a [female] prostitute," says the 40-year-old North. "I was trying hard to juggle living a double life." Mrs. North immediately threw him out of the house, and he stepped down from his pulpit. Recalling this, the minister's smooth, gentle voice becomes peppered with anger, frustration and then sadness. "I just wanted God to deliver me from the lies."

No wife, no home, no church, North went to live with David York, a longtime family friend and godfather to the Norths' youngest daughter. Several months later, York admitted that he was homosexual as well. The two men realized that their interest in one another was more than just a friendship, but for fear of losing his daughters, North decided to keep his new relationship a secret.

Several months passed, and with the support of his new relationship and a recent appointment as a minister at the Washington, DC Metropolitan Community Church -- a gay and lesbian congregation -- North mustered the faith and the courage to end the lies once and for all. He told Kathryn that he was gay. North also mentioned one more thing -- that while York and he could not legally be married, they would be solidifying their relationship in a "holy union" ceremony. Mrs. North was outraged. "She said our marriage had been a lie and that I'd stolen 10 years of her life," North says.

Mrs. North immediately took her ex to court to terminate all of his visitation rights. "I was wrong to lie to her and put her and the kids through hell," North says. His soft brown eyes become softer. "The kids are the real victims here."

North v. North was bitter from the start. Mrs. North painted her ex as a foul, filthy man, an uncaring, violent lout who once slapped her. She accused him of molesting their children, tried to create fear that he might infect them with HIV and said she had no intention of allowing the girls to be exposed to a so-called homosexual lifestyle. “I thought the court would make me say good-bye to my girls forever,” says North of his frightful battle to retain partial custody of his children. In the end, the court ruled that North could continue to see his three girls -- ages ten, eight and five -- and to have them for overnight visits as well.

With a sigh of relief, North leans back in his chair. He’s no longer being scrutinized by a “sea of media maggots” looking for a sex scandal or by judges and lawyers who find his sexuality reprehensible. No more crying, punching walls, doubting God or lying to himself. “I got my children back.”

The only lie he has to tell these days is the one mandated by the court: To refrain in any way from disclosing the nature of his relationship with York to his daughters. “I hope to tell them one day,” North says, holding the “David and David” wedding album covered with the two men pictured in matching tuxedos. One day he hopes his daughters will see the photos inside: North and York exchanging rings, cutting the cake, gathering with friends around their “just married” limousine. But, most of all, North hopes to encourage his girls to live honest lives. No shame, no fear and most of all, no lies.

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