

Good Sport Tackles Tough Season

Meet Colin Higgins Courage Award Winner Greg Congdon



“I have always thought of myself as a regular American jock. I want to be a policeman someday,” says Greg Congdon. He was certainly a jock, as a varsity letterman in football and wrestling. But in his small hometown of Troy, PA, Greg didn’t get to be an average jock.

Greg says, “It wasn’t acceptable to be gay at my high school. But I’ve known I was gay since junior high.” So when he was a junior at Troy Senior High School, he overdosed on prescription drugs.

His suicide attempt failed, but when hospital employees questioned him about why he did it, he told them it was because he’s gay. Word leaked back to one of Greg’s teammates.

Greg’s teammate told the entire school. “I was completely ostracized. My best friend told me ‘we can’t be friends anymore.’ My old teammates told me, ‘if you try to play sports, we’ll make you wish you hadn’t.’”

A month later, with his entire social world turned against him, Greg attempted suicide a second time. He survived, but faced even more threats and humiliation at school. Greg met with school officials to tell them he felt unsafe. They told him that they couldn’t protect him outside of school. They told him to drop out of school and study for his GED with a tutor, which he did. Greg says, “The worst part was missing my sports and the feeling of being on a team. So I still went to sports events, but I couldn’t go alone, and of course people were staring at us.”

After his second suicide attempt, however, a doctor gave him a copy of *XY*, a gay youth magazine. Greg sent in his picture and his story. *XY* published his story, which then caught on in other media, such as ESPN and the Associated Press. The Colin Higgins Foundation is now honoring Greg for the strength and courage with which he managed his ordeal.

Being in all the papers was overwhelming at first. Greg says, “you take a small town country boy and throw him into the spotlight, and it’s going to be a shock.” And of course he still had to fear for his safety. But he says, “I realized other gay teens were reading my story and it was helping them with their feelings of being alone, so I wanted to do it.”

His senior year, Greg even went back to his High School to start a Gay/Straight Alliance. But the guidance counselor told him that the only reason she let him in her office was because “they had to let any concerned citizen in,” and that having a Gay/Straight Alliance would “violate people’s religious rights.”

Despite Greg's disappointment, he is still serving as a role model, advising gay students around the country. He says, "Other people wouldn't let me just be a gay jock. But I tell myself, I had to do it the hard way, so others will have it easier."

To arrange to interview Greg Congdon or other recipients of the 2000 Colin Higgins Courage Awards, contact Paul Cates at 212/245-0510 or by e-mail at pcates@promediacomm.com.