

For more than a decade of getting part-time and full-time jobs, employers have rarely asked to check my original Social Security card. When they did, I showed the photocopied version, which they accepted. Over time, I also began checking the citizenship box on my federal I-9 employment eligibility forms. (Claiming full citizenship was actually easier than declaring permanent resident “green card” status, which would have required me to provide an alien registration number.)

This deceit never got easier. The more I did it, the more I felt like an impostor, the more guilt I carried—and the more I worried that I would get caught. But I kept doing it. I needed to live and survive on my own, and I decided this was the way.

Mountain View High School became my second home. I was elected to represent my school at school board meetings, which gave me the chance to meet and befriend Rich Fischer, the superintendent for our school district. I joined the speech and debate team, acted in school plays, and eventually became co-editor of *The Oracle*, the student newspaper. That drew the attention of my principal, Pat Hyland. “You’re at school just as much as I am,” she told me. Pat and Rich would soon become mentors, and over time, almost surrogate parents for me.

After a choir rehearsal during my junior year, Jill Denny, the choir director, told me she was considering a Japan trip for our singing group. I told her I couldn’t afford it, but she said we’d figure out a way. I hesitated, and then decided to tell her the truth. “It’s not really the money,” I remember saying. “I don’t have the right passport.” When she assured me we’d get the proper documents, I finally told her. “I can’t get the right passport,” I said. “I’m not supposed to be here.”

She understood. So the choir toured Hawaii instead, with me in tow. (Mrs. Denny and I spoke a couple of months ago, and she told me she hadn’t wanted to leave any student behind.)

Later that school year, my history class watched a documentary on Harvey Milk, the openly gay San Francisco city official who was assassinated. This was 1999, just six months after Matthew Shepard’s body was found tied to a fence in Wyoming. During the discussion, I raised my hand and said something like: “I’m sorry Harvey Milk got killed for being gay . . . I’ve been meaning to say this . . . I’m gay.” I hadn’t planned on coming out that morning, though I had