

party in the living room of its rented townhouse in this suburb 25 miles north of Boston. One of the uncles pointed at the comedian Jerry Seinfeld in a television commercial and described him with a gay slur, and said that such "sick" people needed to be "put into institutions." Another uncle laughed. Corey's mother, unaware at the time of Johnson's sexual orientation, said she chided her brothers and asked them not to use such language.

Johnson said he went into the bathroom and cried. A month later, he told his guidance counselor and biology teacher that he was bisexual. He says he was a virgin at the time. Later, he told his lacrosse coach that he was gay. All three were supportive. They also began to understand his moodiness and mediocre grades.

#### ONE OF HIS PARENTS WASN'T SURPRISED

He told no one else during that summer and the football season of his junior year. He joined the school's Gay Straight Alliance, which was made up mostly of straight girls. Since he was known for defending kids being hazed or bullied, no one found this remarkable. In December 1998, the football team voted Johnson and Dave Merrill co-captains.

After Christmas vacation, he decided to tell his parents. His father already knew. He had read an exchange between Johnson and a gay e-pal. For months, his father held the secret; he did not want to burden his wife, absorbed in ministering to her dying mother.

"I dropped the ball," he said in retrospect. "What if Corey had done something to himself?"

A burly, 45-year-old, chain-smoking former marine who drives a Pepsi-Cola truck, Rod had helped raise Johnson since the boy was 1. He and Johnson's mother, Ann, who gave birth to Corey when she was single, were married 12 years ago. Johnson never knew his biological father, though he kept his last name. (For reasons of "privacy and safety," Rod and Ann agreed to be interviewed only if their last name was not published. They also have a 10-year-old daughter.) Ann's reaction, according to both of them, was the unreserved love she had always offered, but now it was tinged with fear; if people found out, would they be mean to her son, would they hurt him?

That spring, Donna Cameron, a health teacher at the school and a Gay Straight Alliance adviser, took the group to a conference of the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network, a national organization that works with Massachusetts' Safe Schools program. Johnson attended a sports workshop led by Jeff Perrotti, the organization's Northeast coordinator. Perrotti talked about challenging the entitlement of athletes and finding a way for all students to be treated as well.

At the end of the session, Johnson raised his hand and said he was a football captain and wanted to come out and needed help.

#### PLAYER'S STATEMENT THOUGHT TO BE A JOKE

Perrotti, a 41-year-old openly gay former high school teacher, said he immediately realized what this meant. "A football captain is an icon," he said last week, "and one coming out would raise the expectations of what was possible, it would give hope."

Masco, as Masconomet is called up here, is the regional high school of 1,300 students for affluent, predominately white Boxford, Topsfield and Middleton. The phrase "Only in Masco," used by friends and critics, often refers to its liberal commitment to diversity and alternate education. Pugh, the football coach, a warm, steady 50-year-old from Long Island, seems equally at home on the field and in what he calls his "touchy-feely world" as a special-education teacher.

Perrotti said he consulted with Bob Norton, the Woburn High School principal, who

had been a football and hockey coach. Johnson's mother came to school for meetings with the staff and Perrotti. It was decided that Johnson would first tell his junior classmates on the team, on April 8, 1999, more than a year after he had first told some teachers.

Three days before the meeting, Cameron, 52, the Gay Straight Alliance adviser, who had been out as a lesbian to friends and family, came out to her students. "I didn't want Corey to stand alone," she said last week. "I wanted to put a second human face on what for most of the kids was just an abstract when they used gay slurs. As it turned out for both Corey and me, kids found it even easier to talk to us about other problems."

The day before the meeting, Johnson came out to Pugh. It was fine with him, Pugh said, as long as everyone remembered that the football season was about football and that it would not become a "media circus" that would spoil everyone else's experience. That attitude prevailed; a major magazine was turned away last fall, and until now there has been no mainstream national exposure.

Ann and Rod were not persuaded about even this controlled coming out.

Rod said, "I felt he was putting a target on his back."

Ann said: "We were afraid for him that he would be hurt. But if I said no, then we were acting as if we were ashamed of who he was."

At the meeting, in Pugh's classroom, Johnson told his teammates that he was gay, that he hoped for their support and not to worry. "I didn't come on to you last year in the locker room and I'm not going to do it now," he said. "Who says you're good enough anyhow?"

That lightly dropped remark had been scripted in the preliminary meetings.

Outside, in the hall, Merrill said players asked him if it was a joke. The news spread quickly through the school. There were several scrawled gay slurs, but no one was going to go bashing the football team.

"It sort of all evolved through the summer lifting program and into the season," Merrill said. "It escalated and then it dropped off. It got to be old news."

"At first the team was meek about it," Johnson said. "People didn't talk to me, and when they saw it was still just me they asked all kinds of questions. They wanted intimate details. They thought it would be cool to know more about the subculture. When they heard about a gay bar called the Ramrod, they asked me to get them T-shirts."

Whelan,\*COM020\*\*COM020\* visiting his girlfriend at college, met an openly gay "fun guy," who he thought would be perfect for Johnson. He told them about each other and tried to fix up a double date.

The most dramatic incidents were football related. Pugh said the president of Masco's active booster club, the father of four past, present and future players, demanded that Johnson be removed as captain for "unit cohesiveness."

Pugh told the father that he was the divisive one, and that it was not an issue.

The night before a game, the captain of the Lynnfield team made anti-gay remarks in a pep rally speech. His coach benched him.

At the game, an opposing lineman shouted gay slurs in Johnson's face.

"I couldn't stop laughing," Johnson said. "Here, I had come out to my teachers, my parents and my team, and this guy thought he could intimidate me?"

#### FINDING A DATE FOR THE SENIOR PROM

Johnson and Perrotti like to say that the team bonded through the experience, but other players are not so sure. While Whelan and Merrill attended and spoke at gay-rights

conferences, and the team once sang the gay anthem, "Y.M.C.A.," after Johnson had a particularly good game, there was an element of distraction. Merrill said "some kids were nervous and had to be talked to." Masco dropped from 10-1 in 1998 to 7-4, but Pugh attributes that to the loss of last season's quarterback and star running back.

Some problems never did materialize. When younger players complained to Merrill about having to shower with a gay teammate, he would growl, as he would to most complaints, "You're a football player, just suck it up." But then, Masco football players have traditionally never showered at school.

Although Johnson's parents and many of his teachers and coaches think he should go to college in the fall, he said he has decided to "become an activist" for a year and to intern in the network's San Francisco office.

Merrill is going to the University of New Hampshire, without a football scholarship but confident that he will walk on the team.

"I'll know now I'll be able to make it in the real world," he said. "I handled it. I was mature. We were a unit."

Whelan is going to the Rhode Island School of Design in the fall. That "fun guy" he spotted finally met Johnson, at a gay conference. Whelan was right. They liked each other. The fun guy, Michael, became Johnson's first boyfriend, and next month Johnson will take him as his date to the Masconomet senior prom.

The season isn't over yet.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

##### HON. ROBERT E. ANDREWS

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 9, 2000

Mr. ANDREWS. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 146, I was unable to vote because of travel delays. Had I been present, I would have voted "nay."

On rollcall No. 147, I was unable to vote because of travel delays. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye."

On rollcall No. 148, I was unable to vote because of travel delays. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye."

##### HONORING MS. MABLE MAXINE WRIGHT OF LOS ANGELES, CA

##### HON. BOBBY L. RUSH

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 9, 2000

Mr. RUSH. Mr. Speaker, today I commend and celebrate the accomplishments of Ms. Mable Maxine Wright of Los Angeles, California, before her untimely passing on May 3, 2000. Ms. Mable Maxine Wright is the mother of Timothy Wright who served on my staff in 1997 and 1998. Tim is a fine young man who has gone on to devote his energy to continued public service. His mother, Mable Maxine Wright was a strong lady, who dedicated her life to education and helping people from many different backgrounds and walks of life.

Mable Maxine Wright was born on July 1, 1921 in Los Angeles, California. Mable was the third of four children born to Mattie Mitchell-Brown and Annias Brown. She attended Nevin Elementary, Lafayette Junior High and graduated from Jefferson High School. She

married Timothy W. Wright, Jr. on September 14, 1947. Her family includes seven children, Kaaren Drake, Gregory Wright, Phyllis Williams, Timothy Wright III, Janis Bradley, Korliss Robinson and Melrose Rowe; two sisters, Janice Robinson and Dorthy DeHorney; two sons-in-law, Harold Williams and Alonzo Robinson; two daughters-in-law, Evelyn Wright and Dr. Karen Nash Wright; thirteen grandchildren, Felicia, Michael, Erika, Ryan, Larshay, Joseph, Brittany, Ashley, Kristin, Timothy IV, Kouri, Jasmine, and Kelsi; sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, many nieces, nephews, cousins and a host of friends.

Ms. Mable Maxine Wright was the moral compass and center of leadership and determination for her family and community. She was committed to setting and meeting goals towards furthering her career, and helping many others who could benefit from her successes. Mable took college courses at East Los Angeles Jr. College where she received training and later became a Licensed Vocational Nurse. Mable worked at County General Hospital for nine years before moving on to Bowers Manufacturing Company where she retired as a Computer Supervisor.

Mable accepted Christ as her personal Lord and Savior at an early age while attending

Hew Hope Baptist Church. She joined Grant A.M.E. Church in 1965 and was a member of the Ladies Usher Board for several years. She was a relentless community builder. Through her life she has learned that living a good life while striving for continued blessings for her family matter and is necessary.

Known as "Precious" to her grandchildren, she especially loved being with her family, and was honored with that desire through the beginning of the next phase which she serves God. My fellow colleagues please join me in honoring the memory of Ms. Mable Maxine Wright, a true beacon of our society.