

# **This couple has been together for 34 years. They're caring for the parents they worried about coming out to.**

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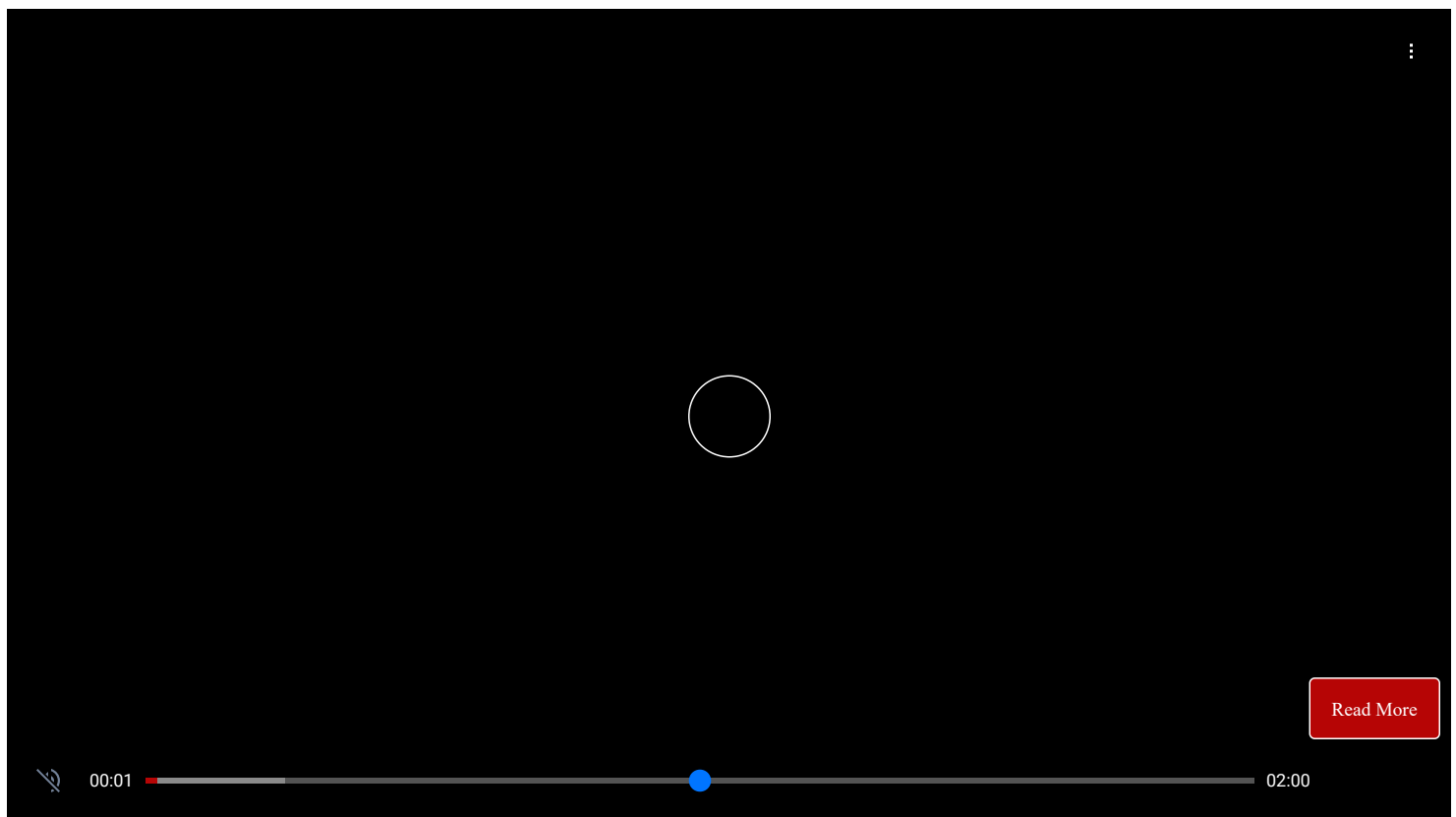
It was 1989. Harold Becker lived in Tampa, Florida, and worked in the banking industry. On the morning of April 13, he attended a meeting and everything was normal — until John Goltz walked in.

Harold said he noticed John right away, "partly because he was the youngest person there," he recalled, close to his own age, but mostly because he felt a connection to him. But this was the late 1980s — the height of the AIDS pandemic, when gay men were "turned into something to fear," a Reuters article reported. Harold didn't know how to name or share the feelings he had, and didn't want to.

"You are told you are wrong, not part of humanity. You can't be who you are," he told CBS News he thought at the time.

"I was much more closeted and trying to blend in. I was not looking for any relationship."

John was also struggling with similar feelings. He had just graduated from St. Olaf College in Minnesota before he moved to Tampa, and he suffered from "anxiety and often had migraines." He said he thought this was normal; he was "dating women" and trying to live in society. He didn't realize he was in survival mode.



Harold and John quickly became friends. They even went on double dates with women. Both knew there was something more but didn't want to say it — until just more than a year later on May 13, when John came out to Harold.



John Goltz and Harold Becker on Sept. 9, 1990, the day the couple committed to each other.

COURTESY JOHN GOLTZ

Once they each knew the feelings were reciprocated, John's anxiety and migraines subsided. They made a commitment to each other on Sept. 9, 1990, to have a spiritual partnership. The couple wanted to move their relationship forward by living together and being able to be public in front of their family and friends — but the last hurdle was telling their families. They wanted and needed their families' support.

John told his parents. He said his mother was more supportive but after he came out he didn't speak to his father for months.

Harold was hesitant. His parents were German and he said they had a different cultural outlook.

"Parents are supposed to love you unconditionally but that is not always the experience — I could lose my entire family in the process," he said. Harold decided to take his parents, Gisela and Horst, on a walk on New Year's Day, 1991.

Gisela, his mother, said she "started to have my suspicions when Harold was around 14 years old," so when they went on the walk and he came out to them, "we embraced it, mostly because we already suspected it." Horst generally followed his wife's example but "I didn't really understand all of it. However, over time, I came to see them as a couple like anyone else."

Seeing his son was gay, Horst said, "I stopped telling inappropriate jokes and started speaking out positively when I encountered others that were homophobic or just ignorant."

Harold and John continued their careers, moving to Virginia and starting the Love Foundation in 2000, to celebrate unconditional global love.



Harold Becker and John Goltz married on Sept. 9, 2015 - 25 years into their relationship.

COURTESY JOHN GOLTZ

They returned to Tampa in 2013 and bought a house on a lake, "large enough for all four of us," Harold said. The couple got legally married on Sept. 9, 2015 — 25 years after their initial commitment. Same-sex marriages began in Florida in January 2015 after U.S. District Judge Robert Hinkle ruled that a ban was unconstitutional, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled later that year same-sex couples have a right to marry nationwide.

John's mother and stepfather came to the wedding, and Harold's family was there to support them.

As Gisela and Horst started to age and Horst became legally blind, Harold and John decided to move them into the Tampa home to care for them. Gisela and Horst are now 86 and 89 years old.

The couple takes them to doctors' appointments, social events and provide company and care — a role reversal none of them could have imagined all those years ago when Harold and John were so eager for their approval.

"Now that we are in need of their care due to age and health issues, they continue to be a very important part of our lives and we rely upon them for so much. Because of them, we can still enjoy living in a regular home and do not have to be in skilled care," wrote Gisela and Horst in an email.

Harold, 61, and John, 58, just celebrated their 34th anniversary and are happy they were able to come full circle with their family and in the end, completely love and support each other. "We look back at our history," said Harold. "We are aware many people have difficult versions of this and ours in the end went quite smoothly."

He said while in some ways their story sounded sweet and easy, "opening your mouth and saying to your parents 'I'm gay,'" in 1990 — a time when gays were told their love was wrong and gays were fundamentally wrong — was akin to having to "step off a cliff."

"When you persevere out of that you realize that you are part of something much bigger," said Harold. "You realize you are part of humanity, and even though much of humanity doesn't understand it, you can't not be who you are."





Harold Becker and John Goltz visit Epcot with their aging parents Gisela and Horst.

COURTESY JOHN GOLTZ