

connection

The Journal of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. April 2007 Vol. 31 No. 4



God regards us as His children. He has redeemed us out of the careless world and has chosen us to become members of the royal family, sons and daughters of the heavenly King...Parents love their children but the love of God is larger, broader, deeper than human love could possibly be. It is immeasurable.

—Ellen White *Christ's Object Lessons*

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Who we are...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a non-profit support organization. We minister to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and intersex individuals, their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is an organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people.

Founded in 1976, the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the US. Kinship has a board of up to 15 officers and 13 regional coordinators. The current list of members and friends includes several thousand people in 43 countries.

SDA Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn, or even mention, homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts, which are often used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBT has its roots in a misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

Support Kinship

Kinship operates solely on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBT Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to SDA Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below. (You can also donate, using your Visa or Master Card, by contacting Karen Wetherell at treasurer@sdakinship.org. She will phone you so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

SDA Kinship, PO Box 69, Tillamook, Oregon 97141, call toll-free in the U.S. 866-732-5677 or toll from outside the U.S. 01 (941) 371-7606, or visit SDA Kinship's Web Site at: www.sdakinship.org.

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Journey

Jerry McKay – Ontario, Canada

That I am a professing Christian is applauded by some and challenged by others. Gay acquaintances, who have been hurt by organized religion, wonder how I can continue to be a Christian. Christians ask me, as a “practicing” homosexual, how I can consider myself a Christian. To those who take time to listen, here is my story.

I grew up in rural Ontario, thirty miles from Canada’s capital. My parents were not farmers, but my father’s brother had a small farm. I spent many summers living at the farm, helping my uncle do the chores and bring in the hay – using horses! As a child, I lived in a century-old house with no hot running water and a wood furnace that kept us warm in winter. The blast from the one large furnace grate in the middle of the room would lift my mother’s skirts like a parachute. Once I blistered my feet when I stepped onto the hot grate and froze. My first eight years of school were in one-room public schools. I was in elementary school before Bell Canada upgraded our home to a “dial” phone!

I grew up surrounded by religion. Baptists, Anglicans, United Church of Canada, and Jehovah’s Witnesses were all represented. No one was an Adventist, but Adventism was closer than I realized. Every Sunday morning my father listened to The Voice of Prophecy, usually after a weekend of heavy drinking. To this day, when I hear “Lift up the trumpet and loud let it ring”, I can see my father sitting in his chair listening to H.M.S. Richards Senior as the smell of bacon cooking filled our house. My mother read Bible stories to me and helped me memorize The Lord’s Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. On occasion she would sing Jesus Loves Me and Away in a Manger; both of which can still move me to tears. I went to Sunday school at the United Church, but only during summer. Low attendance during winter didn’t warrant keeping the old wooden church open then.

Out of the blue, my mother took my sister and me to the local Adventist church on the day before



Easter, 1964. The faithful little group (founded in fact, by H. M. S. Richards Senior) became my spiritual home. My Sabbath school class with its songs, felt board and Primary Treasure were a weekly sanctuary from the chaos and pain created by my father’s drinking.

With delight, I was baptized on May, 10th 1969. I embraced the Seventh Day Adventist message with enthusiasm. Sabbath keeping, the Spirit of Prophecy and health reform all made sense to me. I was very happy to be a part of a ‘movement’ I believed God had called into existence. In my 12-year old mind, I just knew that if everyone did what God wanted, parents would not argue, fathers would not drink,

everyone would go to church on Sabbath and everything would be right in the world! Even so, everything was not right in my own world. My father’s drinking was deeply distressing but it was not the only thing threatening my peace.

My sexuality was already awakening. There had been instances of sexual “exploration” with neighbourhood boys by the time of my baptism. Even then, I sensed that our ‘explorations’ did not mean the same to them as they did for me. Despite my attraction to my male friends, I tried to “think about” girls and managed to kiss one neighbourhood girl. There were no sparks. As one who was trying to take my relationship with Jesus seriously, any sexual experimentation was tempered by my convictions. While the other twelve and thirteen years old boys played hockey, experimented with cigarettes and alcohol, and learned about the female anatomy from their father’s magazines, I read my Bible and thought about how to give Bible studies.

My avid Bible reading meant I had already come across the story of Sodom in Genesis and the prohibitions of Leviticus 22:18. Because I did not have the background to deal with these texts, nor the courage to talk to anyone about them, I experienced a very private anguish that cut deep into

my spiritual psyche.

I believe my sexual orientation, even at that early age, was made especially difficult for me because of my whole-hearted embrace of a particular aspect of Christian theology held in Adventism. My behaviour was guided by a theology of “intent” – God’s intent for humanity. My observance of Sabbath was supported by our belief that God intended it to be the day of worship. I became a vegetarian because I believed it was a part of God’s original intent. Naturally, I accepted that God intended me to be in a relationship with a woman.

Because I so much wanted to please God, it was profoundly distressing to believe there was something about me – which I had not chosen – that was out of harmony with God’s intent. I felt imperfect – like those sheep and goats that were rejected as offerings because of some blemish in them. I carried this secret everywhere: to church each week, to summer camp every summer and to bed at night. Nevertheless, by the time I was fifteen, I knew there was only one career path for me – the ministry. In 1971, in my second year of high school, I enrolled at Kingsway College in Oshawa, Ontario.

My high school years remain one of the happiest periods of my life. I was away from the turmoil at home. I was living at the epicentre of Adventism in Canada. Unlike the small but rowdy rebellious crowd of second and third generation Adventists, I relished the rules. I didn’t have a problem with the ‘all boys together on the right side of church’ seating rule! During those years friendships developed that would fill much of the void in my life.

Spiritually, I continued to do what I had done since my

baptism: seek God in prayer, study my Bible and read Spirit of Prophecy. My reading always gravitated to the gospels and those writings of Ellen White that focused on the life of Jesus. In addition to my Bible, a copy of *The Desire of Ages* accompanied me everywhere. To the best of my ability I practiced spending a “thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ”. I loved the God I found revealed in Jesus.

Except for my blemish, I believed I was on my way to become a “living sacrifice” for my God. After graduation I moved west to Alberta to begin studies in theology at Canadian Union College. They were great years but my sexual orientation was becoming increasingly hard to ignore. During my high school and college years I made attempts at dating. While the spirit was willing the flesh wouldn’t cooperate. Emotionally, psychologically and physically, I could never move those relationships toward anything that resembled a heterosexual relationship. The absence of physical attraction for the opposite sex, while privately distressing, only heightened my image as a devout Christian man. I am sure I was an enigma to most of the women who knew me.

It is difficult to explain how I could know on one level that I was attracted to my male friends and yet not be “out” to myself. There was nothing about my world, at Kingsway or Canadian Union College, that was set up to help me come to terms with my experience. For the church, even on its campuses, homosexuality and sexual orientation didn’t exist.

There were times when I was completely taken off guard by the needs I was always repressing. I still remember one experience while glancing

through an issue of *Time* magazine. A tiny picture of two men holding hands, in an article about homosexual life in California, touched something deep within. Frightened by the intense feelings of isolation and loneliness that broke into my consciousness, I responded as I always did. I shoved those feelings down into my growing pool of psychological and spiritual distress.

As I approached my final year in theology the pressure to get married grew, but I couldn’t go there. In fact, the year I graduated, I lost a soul mate I had known since high school. Had anyone asked me, I would not have said this woman and I were dating. I know she thought differently. In our final months of study, she gently confronted me about where our relationship was going. Because of my inability to face the truth, in what was a hurtful and very confusing response, I told her I didn’t feel for her as she did for me. Understandably, our lives went in different directions. Although she would not know about my orientation until years later, there had been red flags. During our six-year friendship we had never been physical – not even a kiss! In fact, the only time I ever held her hand was while escorting her to an “approved” social function.

After graduating in 1980, instead of approaching conferences in Canada for a pastoral internship position, I returned to Japan for a third term as a student missionary. I loved the people, the country and the culture. It was natural that I would return to the only place I felt I could serve God and avoid the marriage expectations of North America ministers. I enjoyed my time in Japan. God blessed by work there. Even so, the psychological strain of denial was increasing. In the fall

of 1981, I stumbled across a copy of Ministry magazine. The black and white cover picture had the shadow of a cross cast over the shattered symbol for masculinity. The large bold title read "The H Solution". I slipped the magazine out of the room. No one ever saw it again!

Later that evening, when I knew I was alone, I brought out that magazine. Instantly, I was lost in the details of the 10-page interview of Colin Cook, a former Adventist minister who, according to the interview, had once been homosexual. The interview discussed the nature of homosexuality, Mr. Cook's testimony of change and subsequent marriage and the 14 steps of Homosexuals Anonymous (H.A.). It announced that he was the director of Quest Learning Centre – a ministry devoted to counselling people dealing with homosexuality. I was mesmerized by Colin's description of how he had overcome his orientation by applying the gospel to his own life. This, combined with what I perceived as his openness, honesty and compassion, lead me to completely entrust myself to him and his promise of healing.

Within a few days, I had written Mr Cook. The sense of connection and hope I felt with the arrival of his first letter was intense. I ordered his tapes and in secrecy listened to them over and over. I even transcribed them in an attempt to internalize every word. Over the next few months we wrote numerous times. He encouraged me to take time away from my work to relocate to the United States. I was lead to believe that the healing I so wanted was possible through a proper application of the gospel and a little time.

The next six months seemed

long, often confusing, but hope filled. In the summer of 1982, I returned to Canada for what I thought would be a short sabbatical. I planned to visit Colin several times, unlock the powers that would "change" my sexual orientation and then return to Japan.

Shortly after returning to Canada, I rented a car and drove to Reading, Pennsylvania. The Quest Learning Center office was on a small mountain at the edge of the city of Reading. A few hundred feet below it stood a large Japanese pagoda! For me, it was a beacon from heaven.

Colin was alone that weekend while his wife was out of town. He had cleared all other engagements in order to maximize my short visit. We connected instantly. At one point, while driving through downtown Reading, Colin noticed that my attention had drifted toward an attractive man on the sidewalk. In a way that conveyed understanding, he put his hand on my knee and said, "He is a good looking man, isn't he?" I felt free to share the secrets of my heart.

When I went to services with Colin that Sabbath, I realized that by entering the church with him I was identifying as homosexual. My fears disappeared as I was introduced to a host of people who welcomed me with open arms. I cannot emphasize the impact that weekend had on me. It represented everything hopeful and affirming that I wanted in my church: understanding, compassion and a commitment to stand by those in distress.

I left Reading three days later filled with hope and trepidation. Hope because everything in the world now seemed possible; trepidation because everything still seemed impossible. The seven-hour drive back to Ottawa was intensely emotional.

In an unexpected change of plans, I decided not to return to Japan. I remained in Ottawa and made plans to relocate to Reading. Buoyed up with courage and the belief my "problem" would soon be fixed, I came out to my sister, my mother, and finally, my father. My sister, not surprisingly, took my announcement in stride. My mother cried but said this was understandable considering my difficult home life. My father, a simple non-Adventist man, was certain my homosexuality was because I had spent too many years in dormitories. Following Colin's advice, I "outed" myself to a select group of church members who agreed to be a support group. Together we would listen to his tapes until I moved to Reading.

What should have been a hopeful period quickly became intensely confusing. The years of repression began to break through my defences. At 27, instead of being quite secure in my identity, I suddenly didn't know who I was. I was not prepared for such an identity crisis. I did not have the means to deal with it. In the seven months prior to moving to Pennsylvania, I experienced bouts of depression and anxiety. I felt driven to connect with other gay people. I was starved for physical affection and affirmation. I was in need of stories; stories of others like me. To meet people, I had to venture outside the familiar circle of Adventism. This left me thinking I was drifting from my moorings. My journals are filled with confusion and angst. At the same time, church – and my little support group – started to feel foreign and unsafe. It was not a place where I could talk about my experience. Slowly I began to believe that the safety I felt with the people at church in Reading had as much to do with

what they could understand of the complexity of sexual orientation and homosexuality as with their spirituality. They understood that my attraction to the same sex was not just an addiction which a 5-day-stop-being-homosexual plan could fix. The only things that helped me survive those few months were the things that had always kept me grounded: prayer and scripture.

I returned to Reading in the spring of 1983. During private and group counselling sessions I spent hours exploring my personal history. My family history fit the “cause” model perfectly. According to that model, my homosexuality was due to the “love needs” I had not experienced, as a child, from my “same-sex parent”. My attraction to the same-sex, therefore, was my misguided, but sexualized, attempt to fulfil the “love needs” I had not received from my father. While it was true that I had virtually had no relationship with my father, the model did not account for many other aspects of my experience. It seemed to me that there was a more innate – in my body – experience to my orientation. Despite this understanding, my desperation to change kept me from questioning what the “reparative therapy” models advocated. I tried to implement the things I was taught, but I was feeling lost and out of control most of the time.

About three months into my stay, I had the unexpected opportunity to meet a number of people from Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. At a carefully arranged meeting, I and several other Quest members met with Kinship leaders, at Quest, so that we could share our successes in the “change” process. While I did not intend to deceive, I was not

honest either. I needed to convince myself, as much as the Kinship members, that my orientation was changing. My testimony had more faith than fact in it.

One outcome of their visit was that I went to Kinship’s Kampmeeting as a guest. Still hungry for stories, I listened more than I talked. I was in awe of Colin’s ability to get married. The stories of those who “had been” married were of special interest. My visit was informative, but difficult. I tried to be open, but I was suspicious. At best, I doubted their commitment to their Christian faith. At worst, I was sure they had sold their souls to the devil and “gay” theology. Nevertheless, I left Kampmeeting having made new friends. They were in a different ideological camp but they had gained my respect.

Back in Reading, my psychological and spiritual distress was deepening. Everything in my experience was pointing to the fact that “change” was not as straight forward or as possible as I had been lead to believe. My reading supported this, the testimonies of Kinship and Quest members supported this, and my own experience supported this. This experience included first-hand knowledge about Colin. For years Colin claimed publicly, even in the Ministry interview, that he was free from homosexuality, except for “temptations”. I knew differently. While I will not recount here what took place between Colin and me, the abusive experiences began the first weekend we met.

It would be years before I could explain why I remained silent and continued to see Colin for counselling. I now believe I kept silent because of shame, fear, and my attachment

to him. The attachment I developed for Colin as a friend, confidant and surrogate father figure led me to fear losing our friendship. I, like many people in similar situations, needed to protect the one who was doing the wrong.

A questionable application of the gospel was also taking a toll on me. The cornerstone of “faith-based” reparative therapy is the principle of “claiming heterosexuality by faith”. This faith is rooted in the call and power inherent in the gospel to transform lives. The theory sounds good but Colin Cook’s application lacked ethical checks and balances. When used on people who feel compelled, by guilt, shame or fear, to change their orientation the result can be disastrous. The gospel was used to give license to “experimentation” with the opposite sex, often ending in marriages that should never have been. Because no one wanted to admit that their “faith” was failing to produce the expected results, honesty was often compromised and successes exaggerated. In the coded language of change “temptation” often meant “my orientation is not changing”. In the brief months I spent at Quest I saw theological craziness push people to the breaking point. When they failed in their attempt to “change”, they were blamed for not having prayed enough, believed enough, claimed their heterosexuality by faith enough. To Colin’s credit, I don’t believe he chastised people in this way. It usually came from pastors and family members who wanted to see change. After only four months, I left Quest; I told no one why.

With no idea of what I was going to do with my life, I headed for Toronto. I ended up back in Ottawa. Before I moved to Reading, I had become

friends with Robert. On my return he thought we were going to start a life together. I'm not sure what I was thinking. Spiritually and psychologically it was a horrible time for me. I became overcome by the fact I had no work and could see no meaningful future. One Sunday morning, while Robert was doing laundry, I called the director of the language schools in Japan to see if I could return. By the time Robert came back from doing the laundry, I had decided to return to Japan. I was gone within a few days. I should not have returned to Japan, but it was the only place I felt I could go. Confused, lonely and psychologically exhausted, I tried to be the same "perfect" student missionary I had been before I found that copy of Ministry. I could not. My world had been turned upside down.

I made frequent trips into Tokyo to connect with other gay people. I was still trying to make sense of my experience and my orientation. At the same time, I continued "claiming my heterosexuality by faith". My journal is filled with entries describing experiences that were supposed to represent "change". I wrote about sitting close to women on the commuter trains and "perceiving" that I was more comfortable than ever with "feeling the warmth of her body" next to mine. My life was reduced to perceiving, imagining and claiming heterosexuality. I was not actually experiencing it in any authentic way.

The previous year I had told the language school director why I was not going to return to Japan. Now that I was back in that country, I deeply appreciated being able to talk to him. Because I did not tell him that spending time with him was more about lessening

my loneliness than "repairing" my orientation. After only nine months, in June of 1984, I left Japan for the last time. It was a discouraging experience. I was leaving the one place that had been like home to me. Incredibly, I headed back to Reading!

Before settling in Reading I crisscrossed North America using up the air-travel pass I had purchased in Japan. I flew to Reading to visit Colin, Ottawa to see my family, and Seattle to attend an Exodus International conference. At that conference, I met many "change" ministry leaders and participants. I listened to their stories, and spent more time with Colin. Dr. Elizabeth Moberly, the author of *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*, lectured on her 'updated' Freudian model of "cause". While it was good to be with people who understood my "problem", it did not strengthen my confidence in change.

The only reason I can give for returning to Reading was that I was a lost soul with no where else to go. I kept going through the motions of the "reparative" process. All the change I hoped and prayed for was not happening. As usual, I played down the emotional and spiritual distress and kept everything inside. Still intent on staying the course of "change", I stayed at Quest for six months

before moving to Toronto. God was gracious. With only a degree in Theology to put on my resume, I found a job as a mutual funds clerk for one of Canada's largest brokerage firms. I started an Homosexuals Anonymous chapter and lead it for two years. Many were helped, but few, if any changed. I worked at arms length with a "change" ministry in the city. I even did a talk-radio program with the director about reparative therapy. I attended one more Exodus International Conference in New York State.

I made attempts at dating but I could never turn dating into the kind of "experimentation" for which I had been encouraged. Although my attraction to the same-sex was not fading, I was more disillusioned by the fact that my desire for the opposite-sex was not developing. This experience, in fact, was more difficult for me to manage spiritually than any of the sexual abuses I had experienced at Quest.

Once I met with the Toronto Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial association. I stood before twenty pastors, and with confidence and mild embarrassment "outed" myself. It was not easy telling these people, some of whom I had known in theology classes at Canadian Union College, that I was dealing with

homosexuality. I think my story was too personal, too real, for most of them. In the years that followed, no one contacted me to learn more about homosexuality or to ask how I was doing. Those "homosexual" Adventists who did hear about Homosexuals Anonymous did so through newspaper ads – not from their pastors. I can only assume they believed there was no need to inform church members about the group because there were



no “homosexuals” in their congregations. I stopped contacting Adventist clergy.

I finally become so disillusioned that I stopped facilitating H.A. My connection with the “change” ministry grew increasingly distant. Eventually I told the director I was pulling away because I could not continue with integrity. I am not sure if she was more displeased or disappointed. We never spoke again.

Around that time Kinship held Kampmeeting just north of Toronto. Having maintained contact with Ron Lawson over the years, I decided to drop in for a visit. While I enjoyed seeing some old acquaintances, it was also an odd visit. The last day of my visit, during a Kinship-members-only session, I roamed the grounds feeling oddly abandoned. I discreetly kept away from where the discussion was taking place. After Kampmeeting, I understood why. At that meeting, Kinship leaders were informing members of the, soon to be released, damning evidence of Colin’s sexual abuse of his clients. A short time later Quest Learning Center was closed down.

I was livid with Kinship and with Ron, who had prepared the report. I was conflicted about my relationship with Colin but I had maintained contact with him and was protective of him. In my desperation to believe that change was possible, I was blind to the hypocrisy and the damage occurring to others and to me. Over the years, Ron had tactfully asked me about my experience with Colin, but I shared nothing. I had become so accustomed to speaking in coded language that I could not speak truthfully. I was afraid of what the truth might mean. I tried to remain supportive of Colin but, in time, I broke off all

contact with him and watched, from a distance, as his marriage collapsed.

One afternoon, when I could no longer focus on my work, I escaped to a washroom at work and broke down. Exhausted and alone, I silently confessed to The One I had trusted from childhood that I was about to stop trying to change my orientation. I had no idea what that would mean. I could not promise I would be celibate or that I would not enter into a relationship. In every way, this was my crisis of faith.

At the same time, I decided to continue those things that had sustained my faith over the years: reading scripture, praying, and finding fellowship with other Christians. I was not going to abandon God because my orientation had not changed. God would have to abandon me.

Except for one or two friends who helped maintain a sense of family, I would have stopped attending the Adventist church altogether. For the next few years MCC Christos, the smaller sister congregation of Toronto’s Metropolitan Community Church, became my spiritual home. They supported me as I learned to manage the day to day realities of being more open with my homosexuality. Most significantly, I was not forbidden to share my gifts or use my talents at church because I may or may not be a “practicing” homosexual.

When I told Seventh-day Adventists about my decision, many reminded me of what “the Bible said” about homosexuality. They acted as if I had never given much thought to those texts. Others cautioned that, although God is compassionate, God is uncompromising and does not make exceptions. My gay Christian friends encouraged me

to see my sexuality as a gift and celebrate it. I could only entertain that particular thought for brief periods of time. I was not yet able to make the theological shift to believing my orientation was within God’s “intent”. But I was convinced there might be a solution. This conundrum was so challenging that when I was diagnosed with cancer, I told someone that having cancer was easier to deal with than my sexual orientation.

During one particularly difficult period I again brought my situation to God. I was reading 1 Samuel at the time and had reached chapter eleven. Much of the story to that point is about Israel’s desire to have a king. Being familiar with the story, I was not surprised that Israel’s request was not received well, but I was struck by the intensity of the language. Samuel, acting as God’s spokesperson, called their desire “a great wickedness”. I could relate to that! Yet, what did God say? God said they could have a king! This was not what God “intended” for Israel but right there in scripture, God is recorded as saying okay to something God had not “intended”. I could not argue with what God was showing me, but I didn’t know what to do with it.

This verse did not speak to me as deeply as verses twenty through twenty-four. Speaking to the people, Samuel pleads that they – their king included – not abandon God. I was reading The New American Standard at the time, and the word that grabbed my attention was futility. Israel was encouraged – commanded – not to abandon God because that would be futility. In turn, God promised not to abandon them. I felt as though the story had been preserved for me at that time in my life. The story also spoke to

me through the contrasts. Unlike Israel, I had never begged God to “give” me a homosexual orientation; quite the opposite. While Israel didn’t seem to bat an eye at the fact that their desire was regarded “a great wickedness”; I had always felt my orientation was a great wickedness – a blemish to be cut out. This was a pivotal moment for me. I felt as though I was being shown an example I could relate to, and more importantly, a Biblical example by which God could get my attention so that I could hear I needed to hear.

The studies I had read, proving and disproving a genetic or environmental cause for homosexuality, did not get to the heart of what I needed. I needed more than a biological answer or a proof-text answer. I needed a relational answer. I had often been frustrated by the suggestion that homosexuality was just a temptation and that I was treating it lightly. While I knew that was not true, I was not sure how God would relate “to me” even if, as I still believed, my orientation was not what God intended. Now I had an example of how God might balance “intention” and the realities of the human experience.

Of all the “theological” counsel I was given, the suggestion that God is “uncompromising” did not ring true. It was the unreasonable, compassionless, and arbitrary picture of God that didn’t sit right with me. Ironically, the story in 1st Samuel confirmed the great sweeping perspectives about God, sin and salvation I believed were at the heart of Adventist theology. Salvation is as much, or more, about restoring my relationship with God than about God’s punishing and destroying.

I don’t believe this story is

about supporting situational ethics or God being permissive with respect to sin. It is about what is at the heart of God’s ‘greater’ intention for the entire creation – relationship. Without a healthy, solid relationship, based on a correct understanding of God’s attitude toward me, there would be little to build on. I could do all the right things for all of the wrong reasons.

I had long since settled into the belief that God was for me and not against me. All of God’s prohibitions and commands were given for me – not me for them. My best interest was at the heart of God’s “intentions”. There was a reason and a purpose in everything. While God might approve of tithing mint and dill leaves there were weightier matters on which to focus: truth, mercy and justice. If I became heterosexual but could not love, I was nothing.

First Samuel 12 was my turning point. From that moment on, in the late 80’s, I started to approach my orientation differently. Slowly I started living more openly as a gay man. I opened myself up to the “gifts” associated with my orientation. I moved to Ottawa to continue my education. The friendship Robert and I had developed years earlier became a relationship. For 15 years we have enjoyed the blessings of companionship and the challenges of bringing two lives together. I still identify as Seventh-day Adventist and “practice” my faith. I do whatever it takes to resist those forces – from the world and the church – that would have me abandon God. In turn, God has not abandoned me.

While many are supportive and would welcome my contributions to the life of the church, others prefer that I just sit in the pew. Most people

make an attempt to understand this subject while others express no interest. Because I don’t have a pink triangle stamped on my forehead, I am often like the fly on the wall that hears “everything”. It often takes everything I have to remain polite knowing all that I do about “change”, reparative therapy and the churches history with its homosexual members. On occasion, I am a reluctant activist.

I still have moments when the loss of my dream to be a minister casts a shadow across my day, but God has shown me other ways to bring light into the world. When the debate over “reparative therapy” surfaces and difficult memories well up, 1 Samuel 12 comes to mind, and peace returns. Speaking only for myself, I am convinced that God’s greater “intent”, for everyone, is to be in relationship with Him, because, all else is futility.



The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof.
–Barbara Kingsolver

The Royal Love Song

Joseph Alexander - Canada

Okay, I guess I've got to say it out loud: As a "not completely out" gay man it can be challenging to live with humour and integrity as a faithful member within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Like any other invisible minority living in the midst of the comfortable majority, there will be moments of . . . Well, there will be moments.

Take for example the week I was asked to teach the Adult Sabbath School Lesson during Visitors Sabbath. My congregation anticipated that we would have many visitors in attendance. Rather than break into our usual four classes, someone thought it would be more prudent to have all the adults share one large class in the sanctuary. They asked this very welcoming, well known "Son of the Church" to teach the lesson. I imagine our congregational leadership thought I could most easily help our visitors to be comfortable with our local weekly ritual.

Now I'm a bright guy. You might have thought that I could smell a rat or at least sense that I was being set up to manage a delicate situation. Turns out the Sabbath lesson in question was titled: The Royal Love Song: A Study of the Song of Solomon. The week at a glance statement said it all: With an openness some might find shocking, the Song of Solomon explores the beauty of sexual love within marriage. (you can find the lesson at <http://ssnet.org/qtrly/eng/06a/less07.html>)

Two weeks in advance of the study, I opened my quarterly to review the lesson I had committed to teach. Imagine my shock. My leadership had asked this divorced, single parent of two, closeted gay guy to lead the congregation in a study of "sexual love within marriage." How ironic. After some laughs and much prayer I decided that if the Lord had chosen this adventure for me, I would need to find a way to do it honestly.

Long before coming to terms with my "non-straight status", I had always been uncomfortable with the way many Seventh-day Adventists treated issues of sex and sexuality. When the topic came up, long married persons often used the opportunity to speak judgmentally about the practices of young people and the growing acceptance of sexual deviance (lump into this category anything that doesn't involve sex in the missionary position between married heterosexual couples).

Determined that this lesson would be different I decided to challenge the congregation with three Biblical ideals of sex and sexuality as a beginning point of reference for the discussion. I quoted the following texts: Genesis 2: 18, 23, 24 - The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. . . . And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Ideal No. 1: It is God's ideal that we all should be married.

Genesis 1:28 - And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Ideal No. 2: It is God's ideal that all couples should have plenty of children.

1 Corinthians 7:4, 5 - The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Ideal No. 3: It is God's ideal that all couples should continue to be as sexually active throughout their marriage as they were at the beginning of it.

Though I'll admit to stretching the ideals, making these bold statements certainly got the lesson discussion going. Hands were up all over the sanctuary. In a very measured and sympathetic way I listened to each speaker as they began to justify how their lifestyle, though not strictly following the ideals, were still honourable and valuable to God. As if being convinced I stroked my chin and replied to each one something like this: "So you're saying that although you're single and not following God's ideal proscription for your life, you believe you are able to use your single status to the glory of God and you are able to be a

blessing to others?" When the member would reply in the affirmative, I'd nod agreement. "Okay, I'll accept that." In turn I acquiesced to the childless and to the less sexually active. Each time I pointed out to the speakers that, though they strayed from the ideal, their status and sexual expression was still honourable and acceptable to God.

After the tension caused by my initial pronouncements subsided, I pulled in the net. "Okay class, now as we begin to explore the text of the Song of Solomon, and begin to discuss the sexual practices of our young people and others, let us remember that even those who are not following the ideal path of sexual expression and relationships can be acceptable to God. Let us proceed in a spirit of tolerance and acceptance."

The congregation went silent, realizing in that moment that I had led them into a trap. The rest of the lesson proceeded with much discussion, some of it very animated and descriptive, and a good time was had by all. There were no disparaging comments about "young people these days", divorcees, or other "sexual variants".

Joseph Alexander is the nom de plume of the author because he is still in the process of coming out to members of his faith community. Joseph is a clinical, forensic social work practitioner who has worked extensively with children and families in a range of community and forensic settings. He has served the church at the congregational, conference, union and division levels as a layman and volunteer. He is also the very active single parent of two.



Taking Care of Business:

Notes from the March SDA Kinship International Board Meeting

* We are continuing to develop our new web site. We appreciate the work Russ did as our transition web master and are also appreciative that Linda Wright has chosen share her skills for the next steps. Floyd will be the liaison between the Board and our Webmaster.



* Based in the leaflet distributed by Carrol, Floyd and Mike during the prayer conference, we are editing and printing a pamphlet about Homosexuality that will be easy to distribute.



* Kampmeeting 2007 in San Francisco has most of its workshops, speakers and special guests scheduled. Many thanks to Naveen Jonathan, Elena Thomas-Blough, and the Kampmeeting Support Committee from Region Eight who have done so much work to make this a wonderful event.



* European Kinship Meeting 6 has been scheduled for Paris. During that time there will be a mini Coordinators discussion with the Regional Leaders who will be in France.

* Australian Kampmeeting is scheduled for the last weekend in September.

Continued on page 12...

* There are now two US Mini Kampmeetings happening on a yearly basis.

* We are planning another regional Coordinators evaluation and planning meeting over Labor Day Weekend. The Glendale City Church has been kind enough to host us. We are working on planning a conference call for coordinators in the next couple of months and will have a leadership training at Kampmeeting in San Fransico.

* We spent a brain storming session with IMRU? leadership discussing ways to build and strengthen the program. Foci included: Where can we be supports? What are the needs and issues that IMRU? members prioritize? What are the ways Kinship at large can be a support? What are the ways we can work with or provide supports to members who are in college? How does Kinship create an atmosphere that will help IMRU? members become more involved with the larger Kinship organization?



* Because of the high volume of work coming to our volunteer office coordinator, we voted to hire Mike Richhart as an administrative consultant under the direction of Fred Casey.

* In order to strengthen our Kampmeeting site planning process the board asked Jim Chilson to become a member at large who researches venues. He has spent many hours doing this over the last few years.

* The Nominating Committee is working to insure that every elected board position will have at least one Kinship member running for office.

* A formal vote made IMRU? an elected position on the Board of SDA Kinship International. Like the Women's caucus, IMRU? members will elect their own representative.



Kampmeeting San Francisco!!

Sabbath, July 28, we will be celebrating the Gift of Our Families. Please invite your supportive family members and friends to join us for the entire day, including meals, at no charge! We want to recognize those who have been with us on our journey. Carrol Grady, of SDA-FFLAG, invites all relatives to join her during our celebration breakfast feast. A special recognition of our guest families will be part of the Sabbath School Musical Program. Carrol will facilitate a question and discussion time for family members in the afternoon. You can register your guests for Sabbath by completing a Family Day Registration Form on the Kinship website. If they would like to participate in the music for the Sabbath morning services, please include this information on the Family Day Registration Form. If they plan to stay overnight in the Sheraton, they must complete a Kampmeeting registration form in order to receive the same room rates as Kinship members. If they will be flying into San Francisco International Airport, they will also qualify for the United Airlines/Lufthansa flight discount.

May 1 is the deadline for early registration. If you have paid in full by that time you will be

entered into a raffle for a 500.00 discount on next year's Kampmeeting. The online registration form has been updated. It can be accessed at the Kinship website (see below). You can download and print out a PDF version of the registration form. Or, of course, you can use the printed form that is included in this issue of the Connection. For updated information on events, speakers and workshops you can access the Kinship website.

We are excited to announce a new opportunity for our Kinship family to network with each other during the week of Kampmeeting—whether or not you are in attendance! We would like to offer Kinship members who are professionals, who have their own businesses that offer products or services and gay supportive organizations the opportunity to place your business card in the program booklet. For a minimum donation of \$25 and your 2" x 3.5" business card, we will find a special place to announce your work in the Kampmeeting program booklet. All reproductions of cards will be in black and white. If you would like, you can also purchase space in the program for larger ads. Ad sizes in the 8.5" x 11" booklet are offered as follows: 1/8 page (3.75" x

2.25") \$40, 1/4 page (3.75" x 4.5") \$75, 1/2 page (4.5" x 6.5") \$140, Full page (6.5" x 9") \$260. For the page ads, you may submit camera-ready copy electronically or you may take advantage of our professional design services for an additional fee of \$25. Deadline for donations and business cards or ad copy is June 1, 2007.

Mail your check or credit card information and your business card or ad layout to: SDA Kinship International, Karen Wetherell, 90 Putnam Road Springfield, VT 05156 Submit your electronic business card or ad layout to: karenbwetherell@cs.com

Who knows—someday we just may have our own Kinship Yellow Pages!



Family Day registration - http://sdakinship.org/Kampmeeting2007-family_day_registrationform.pdf
Kampmeeting registration - <http://sdakinship.org/km07registration.htm>
Kampmeeting program - <http://sdakinship.org/kampmeeting2007.htm>

Kinship News

Someone To Talk To – Carrol Grady

The estimated 60,000 attendees at the "Just Claim It!" international youth prayer conference, in Dallas on February 28 to March 3, were startled to see an exhibit dealing with homosexuality. The "Someone to Talk to" booth had an excellent location near the entrance to the exhibit hall and across from the very popular Union College climbing wall. Fantastic team members, Floyd Poenitz and Mike Richhart, provided invaluable help in setting up the booth, copying handouts, and coming up with many creative ideas. We had two computer screens, one running the "Open Heart, Open Hand" DVD and the other running a PowerPoint show created by Floyd that attracted a lot of interest. Handouts included Have You Walked in Their Shoes? a booklet of stories; Christians Look at Homosexuality, a collection of supportive articles by various religious leaders, reports of some recent research into the biological evidence for homosexuality, a suggested reading list, and a sheet listing some of the detrimental results of the church ignoring the issue of homosexuality. Floyd also made up a small leaflet to hand out to everyone who passed by. In addition, we had a nightly drawing for a choice of the DVD or my book, Beloved Stranger

Quite a few people told us how happily surprised they were to see someone providing this ministry and shared hopes that the church will do more in this

area. Of course, there were also some who wanted to straighten us out. Mike came up with the idea of handing them a Bible and asking them to show us where the Bible condemns homosexuality. They were all at a loss for where to find it, so we would help them find the texts and then explain a different way of reading them. We probably didn't convince them, but at least they had an alternative to consider. A number of church leaders stopped to talk and showed an attitude of support and appreciation. All in all, we felt it was a very worthwhile project.

Uganda – Joseph Brown

A Kinship member who would like to remain anonymous donated \$4,000 to our orphanage. We have used the funds to buy shoes, uniforms, bed sheets and blankets. We are very grateful to the people who helped make this possible.

Older Kinship Adults – Ren Reynolds

Marge Doyle and I presented a workshop on aging during Kampmeeting 1984. I had gathered material from more than fifteen sources. Each cool, clear morning we looked up from our Quaker Kampground in Colorado to see Pikes Peak looming above us. I found it remarkable to think of Pike's Peak as aging. We learned a few fine truths from Hugh Prather's clarifying and often humorous thought. Here is one from his book Notes on Love and Courage: Time is recorded on

our faces and in our muscles. We see its shadow moving across our childhood friends. What if we saw no passage of time? Then I suspect there would be many areas in which we wouldn't grow; our spirit would remain adolescent.

I would also like to share a site I have found for: A Biblical Defense Guide For Lesbians and Gays and Those Who Love Them. It is <http://www.trafford.com/4dcgi/view-item?item=10043>



Is It?

James Reindollar
Pennsylvania USA

I, like many of you, have wondered if God has really ever spoken to me. Sometimes I feel confident He has, other times I wonder if I merely heard what I wanted to hear. I am sure of one exception. God changed my life saying two sentences, which combined, come to six words in English, none of which contain more than three letters.

While walking in the country, talking with my Lord, agonizing over something I deemed important, I prayed for God's revelation. I didn't expect the words that filled my head. "Jim, you are gay." Part of me screamed out, No, I can't be gay. Another part of me quietly said, I know. I have always known. For as long as I can

remember I have always been attracted to men. As I got older I told myself that it can't be, it is a thought put there by the devil. I have always been told that being gay is a sin. I decided to remind the Lord of this.

He answered. Sort of. Evidently God has retained some of His Jewish customs, because He didn't say to me, "I know it's a sin. You need to let me do a work in you." He didn't say, "Who told you it was a sin? Me, or someone else?" He didn't say, "I love gay and lesbian people. My Kingdom was made for them as well. Some disturbed people have claimed in My name that anyone different from them must not be a Christian." Instead, He replied to my reaction "I know it's a sin!" with, "Is it?" That stopped me.

Is it? Those four letters have begun an investigation. Thanks to careful study of scripture, SDA Kinship, and the amazing stories of others, I am forever learning. I pray soon to start a ministry to reach out to gays and lesbians who have been led to believe that God doesn't love them. I want to "church the church"; the others, with their preconceived notions who have led an attack on God's children. I want to let others know that being gay or lesbian is a special gift given to only a few here on earth. We have been entrusted with a unique kind of love; let us not let the Father down. I thank the Lord for knowing me better than I know myself. Thank you to SDA Kinship and IMRU? for letting me know for sure that I was not alone. God bless.



Whenever you see darkness,
there is extraordinary opportunity
for the light to burn brighter.

—Bono

connection ▽

The Journal of the Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship International, Inc.

Editor: Catherine Taylor
Circulation: Fred Casey
European Editor: Ruud Kielboom
Photography: Karen Wetherell
Production: Ted Compton
Printing: Doolittle's PrintServe

The Connection is published by Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Principal office: Box 69, Tillamook, Oregon 97141, 886-732-5677. Submissions are welcome and may be directed to the editor at connectioneditor@sdakinship.org or mailed to the principle office address above. Include your name as you want it published, address and telephone number. If an item is to be acknowledged or returned please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Some Connection contributors have chosen to remain anonymous or use pseudonyms.

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Subscription requests or address changes may be sent to: Subscriptions, P.O. Box 49375, Sarasota, FL 34230-6375, or call toll free from inside the U.S. at 866-732-5677 or toll from outside the U.S. at 01-941-371-7606, or email office@sdakinship.org. The Kinship mailing list is confidential and used only by Kinship officers. The mailing list is not sold, rented, or exchanged for any purpose.

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