
connection

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More from Larry Hallock on Africa...page 10

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Who we are...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. (Kinship) is a non-profit support organization which ministers to the spiritual, emotional, social, intersex and physical well-being of Seventh-day Adventist lesbian, gay men, bisexual, and transgendered individuals and their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBT 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 20 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 (VISA and MasterCard also accepted).

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Relationship of the Month...

With all the focus on Gay and Lesbian Marriage over this last year, the Connection decided to devote space, over several issues, to telling the story of some of the relationships in our organization. Many people submitted to interviews; over dinner, on the phone, on their way to try to sleep, on breaks from meetings and in the middle of homework. This month's interview is an example of working with a captive audience. Karen was kind enough to be interviewed by a topic desperate editor.

If we were handing out blame, we would probably point a finger at Romilda. Then of course, Ren put in her two cents. At the base of it all, we're pretty sure that God is responsible for this relationship. It's to the three of you that we would like to begin to express our appreciation.

We actually came pretty close to meeting several times over the last seventeen years. We were on the local Seventh Day Adventist conference committee simultaneously, yet never attended a meeting when the other one was present. Karen says that it's because if she had laid eyes on Catherine at that point she would have thrown over her whole life and become a vagabond. It's a nice compliment but Catherine doesn't feel quite that charming.

Karen knew she was interested in women from the time she was twelve. Her first woman lover was at about that age too. Catherine is shocked. She was a much later bloomer. Karen thought that maybe all women were interested in other women, something like a developmental stage. She thought they had to grow up, get married and raise families. (Catherine thinks there was way too much Donna Reed in the water.) Because she wanted to have children and work inside the church, Karen married at 19, had four children, and helped her husband build a corporate career in the Adventist Health System.

In January of 2001 a Presbyterian neighbor came over to thank Karen for horse care and began to talk to her about the ways the Bible does

not condemn homosexuality. (I think we should thank her too.) A light went off in Karen's mind and she began to study, talk to pastors, and dream of a life where she could be a whole human being. In May Karen told her husband she thought she was a lesbian. He helped her find Kinship and she began talking to a variety of women; particularly Cate, Karen and Jan. (more appreciations are in order) Karen's plan was to speak only with people who were in committed relationships or of an age to be in another generation. She did not want to become involved with anyone. In fact she thought she could easily spend the rest of her days single.

Romilda told Karen she might want to talk to this person Rom knew (That's me! That's me!!) but couldn't find her cyber address. At the same time Catherine was sitting on her stoop with her cocker spaniel, (where she was quite happy) and felt impressed to check in with Rom for the first time in a year. Everyone involved was a little startled at the timing. Karen became a cyber stalker. (Yes, she admits to this) When Catherine got on to check her mail, Karen would charmingly instant message her. She wasn't flirting. But that's because she thought Catherine was ancient. She talked Catherine into joining SDA Womyn Friends and putting her profile on line. (So for this we should thank Jacquie) When she realized Catherine was not aged and creaking...well, that changed the course of this story a bit.

Catherine, in true romantic style,

told Karen to go to marriage counseling. When Karen wasn't interested in that, Catherine told her to go date some women, like the soft butch who was selling Kathryn Forest books at Borders and flirting at the cash register. (Karen is wondering if we have to be honest here or can she go with her usual story that Catherine was chasing her around the mid-west. Catherine is both typing and editing this so she's going to exert some control.) It is true that Karen called up a Conference where Catherine had been a Campmeeting speaker on the pretext of inviting her to speak at her church (some invitation), and vetted her. Now how many of you have vetted your relationships? Karen says that all the accountants always follow this procedure. For us it seems to have worked. How on earth why, Catherine doesn't know.

By this point in the story, Karen is reasonably sure there's some sexual attraction going on for her but she doesn't know if she can change cultures. The chasm between a comfortable corporate life in the Adventist Health System and a leap into this particular unknown world is huge... Yolanda tells her about a Region Two vespers and pool party that's taking place in August. Karen was attracted by the spiritual options and decided to take the trek east to see if she could fit into this lifestyle (as the church likes to put it). Her daughters wouldn't let her go alone and chaperoned her to the vespers meeting. Leif assuaged their concerns; somehow

convincing them that Kinship was a safe and friendly place. Karen was allowed to venture out alone to the pool party...where Jim, Leif, Taylor, Yolanda and Joyce spent hours telling Karen to be cautious about trucking up to New England to meet some computer date. Many of you already know just how well Karen followed that particular advice. (But we should also say "thank you" to those five for their part in this relationship) At this point in time it seems like our togetherness has been brought to us, and you, by an entire organization. If we gave every person who has been involved in our meeting the traditional \$1,000 at the wedding for brokering this adventure, we'd be broke ourselves. Karen is wondering who should get the Ellen Degeneres toaster oven. That, we can afford. Seriously, this has been one of the great gifts of Kinship; a community that becomes family.

We've had a packed three years. Karen is building a paid career after nurturing an unpaid one for two decades. We've bought a house. We've had children get used to the idea of a lesbian mom and an earthy crunchy hippie of a step mother. Catherine's been outed and lost her church consulting options, at least for now. We've had Seventh Day Adventist friends stretch their spirituality to encompass loving us. We had other friends who only needed to stretch their arms to include one more person. We've enjoyed Kinship Mini-Kamps, Vermont Kampmeeting (sorry, we got the bed and breakfast option), Board meetings, breakfasts in Burlington, and Kinnet (ACH...we almost forgot to thank Floyd for Kinnet. We never would have had a chance without you!). We've loved this community. And we've come to see a deeper, broader picture of a loving God. For all of this we say thank you. •

The way we were, or...

On the Road to “Wellville”

Heading into our 25th Anniversary Kampmeeting we asked several people who had been members of and/or officers in Kinship over the years to comment on the changes they've seen. Ren, Samuel and Bob were kind enough to respond. We'd love to hear from more of you about this, so please feel free to write and give us your perspectives.

From Samuel Pang

Three things come to mind immediately.

1) In the early days, the organization was always struggling financially. At every Board meeting, the hat was passed, and ultimately, the Board members were the financial mainstay of the organization. More recently, the organization is financially solid with a significant endowment fund.



2) Internet. In the early days, communication was via telephone or U.S. mail, and advertising consisted of posters or advertising in print media. With the advent of widespread internet use, there is now KinNet, and Kinship has its own website, etc. One wonders how we could have lived without the internet just 10 years ago!

3) Support from non-gay Adventists. In the early days, we had to search far and wide to find people willing to come to Kampmeeting to minister to Kinship members. Over the past 15 - 20 years, it has become less and less difficult to find supportive Adventists who are brave enough to come to Kampmeeting. We also have the support of FFLAG, and it appears that our efforts to

educate the grass roots Adventists are bearing some fruit.

There appears to be a disproportionate number of musically talented people in Kinship. We used to observe that if the Adventist church were to drive away all their gay members, they would lose half of the musical talent in the church. And they've already lost a lot of talented people!

Building A Successful Future From Our Past

from Ren Reynolds

There have always been feelings of joy that there was a Kinship--that there is a Kinship. Kinship has filled a place where no other could succeed in helping those who struggle with their GLBTI souls. We are a different voice for those who have been told over and over again that they are going to hell. Because of a continuing and constant need, we still have much teaching to do. I see that each of us has a role; on KinNet, with Kinship and definitely at Kampmeeting. I think it's important that we remember how lonely and isolated many of us have felt as we faced our inner fears. From my perspective this is the most important role of Kinship.

The others are tied in a close second place.

The early years were fraught with angst because many of the women perceived that some of men did not think we were capable of being leaders in this new community. From my perspective, Kinship was devastatingly influenced by a church that, even now, does not allow women to take on the leadership roles for which they are immanently capable. Fortunately that has changed within Kinship. We are the better and stronger for it. Here each of us can be a leader while in the organized church women still wait to take on important roles. I think we are far ahead of the church even though there are so few role models within the church.

We've been impelled to remember those who have left the church. We've needed to remember those who have been forced out by self righteous people who try to control the lives of others, whether or not they are GLBTI. Sometimes I think I am being treated differently because someone has decided I am not an Adventist in their pure sense of the word. I think we've learned judgmental behavior from the church and we have to learn that there are other ways of being. Only I know my journey within my own heart and my soul and I know that it's the same for other members of Kinship. Too many people lost their jobs and too many people were "de-churched in the early days." Even if you do not know us personally, you can imagine our raw feelings. We can heal together, even if a corner of our heart bears difficult memories.

The Regions have been faltering for a few years. I think we continue to struggle to find the reasons. I would recommend having Regional meetings move around to different locations within the region. I believe it's important to have people active in the Region who have experience within the organization. We need to avoid cliques and, like the 12 Step

groups, remember how important it is for us to have new members and to support all of those members. It might be a good idea to have leadership teams visit the Regions and identify specific needs. It might also be a good idea to have training programs for Regional leaders at Kampmeetings. We could have successful Regional leaders share what has worked for them. We might do "needs and interest" surveys. I worry about the people who need support and yet have never been to a single Kinship meeting. The internet

“I worry about the people who need support and yet have never been to a single Kinship meeting.”

continues to be a wonderful way to stay Connected. Perhaps we should use more up to date GLBTI newspapers to advertise local Kinship meetings. I remember that working well in the past. Recently, on Kinnet we saw the benefits of this form of outreach in Region 7. I think it would be a great idea to advertise Kampmeeting in the Oregon newspapers and to have a follow-up article during Kampmeeting. This kind of moment to moment advertising has always been powerful. Let's do a restart this year!

I think we need to stay connected to our Non Adventist GLBTI communities. PFLAG is a wonderful group. They offer much of the same kind of support we do, without the religious focus. Most

of them have lending libraries. Our local chapter has eight or ten books about Biblical perspectives on homosexuality. Many religions, including Seventh Day Adventists attend PFLAG meetings. This organization has a constant influx of new people. It is wonderfully supportive. Some of its founders are still active, even after more than twenty years. PFLAG is a great mix of parents and GLBTI people. They all give advice on coming out issues. We can learn, first hand what parents go through as they struggle to accept their children. PFLAG has over 500 active local programs in the United States. They have some great guest speakers who understand us and our needs. They could be a great help to people where there is no Kinship group.

I know that we have supported people who want to organize meetings for SDA GLBTI in Europe, South America and in Australia. It's good that our leaders can take trips to these places to be supportive of new groups. Maybe we can figure out a way to support the leaders to do more of this.

I would like to see us study how to deal with cultural and religious fear factors. I think we need to have even better ways to help people feel safe enough to come out to us. The church has become more lenient around issues like movies but much more vocally negative about lesbian and gay people. I know they have a negative effect on people who are struggling with their sexuality or their gender because I often see these threads on Kinnet. I think the pressure from the church against us is stronger now as it has become more vocal in local churches. We must continue to get better ways to make a safe place.

I like that we are creating a community in Kinship where we who are GLBTI can use our talents for our larger GLBTI community. I believe it's important to involve everyone where they can be involved. I think we should train people to go to schools and talk

Wellville...

with young people who might be just now, thinking about coming out. We could build a speaker's bureau. I know our lives are busy but this could be a way of giving back to Kinship.

I appreciate the board members who arrange time to meet and work on goals. I appreciate encouragement of new talent. I appreciate those who are building new projects. I would like to see the board use Kinnet and the Connection to communicate with the members about their projects and plans. Those would be avenues that would help the world members keep up to date on what the organization is "doing" for us. We'd have a lot more to appreciate! Kinnet and maybe, the Connection could give us a form of two way conversation. We need to hear the new voices on the board. As an older member, I cannot yet relax my vigil. I want to relax so you can take your place working with the old and new things that unite us. Some of you new board members may understand that you age in the organization. Along with my suggestions, I want to thank you for your time and dedication and support.

It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.

—Aristotle

Help Wanted

One Connection Production Person. Will work with remarkable team of photographers, editors, writers, and mail room staff. Must have a sense of humor and design. If you are interested, please contact Bob Bouchard.

From Bob Bouchard

Here are my musings on the 25th Kampmeeting. I was



president of Kinship from 1982 to 1988 and from 2001 to the present (at least I'm pretty sure it was 2001--time does fly).

How things have changed since the first Kampmeeting! That first meeting at a motel outside Phoenix, Arizona was small – with just a few Adventist gay people meeting with a number of church officials – and intense. In a world before "Will and Grace," Ellen and almost daily court decisions on gay rights, a lot of the attendees at some point in their lives had thought they were the only people in the world with "those feelings." Many had been married at one point and/or had been kicked out of the Church. All of them had summoned up enormous personal courage to meet with seven church leaders (i.e. pastors, teachers, Church officials) in that summer in 1980. The entire meeting focused on identity and theological issues. There were many tears as those present related their coming out stories to representatives of a church that had no history of understanding this issue. It was an amazing breakthrough. The Kinship we know was formed as a result of that first Kampmeeting.

Today, we often get over 100 people to Kampmeeting in the course of the week. We seldom get new attendees coming to Kinship thinking they are "the only ones." The meeting itself now focuses as much on family relationships, science, law, socializing, religious nurture as it does on theology. We're long past the stage of asking is it OK to be gay? We know it is. What has not changed is how people's coming out stories never stop touching all of us--evoking tears of recognition. For an Adventist, coming out is

still a struggle. Kampmeeting at its most powerful has always been a catalyst for people to better accept themselves.

I missed the first Kampmeeting, but I've been to 23 of the 24 since (missed Minnesota too!). Wouldn't miss them! Every Kampmeeting is different--different speakers, different topics, different places. But, at bottom, they have all been the same--a place to get to relax with others like yourself; to share painful memories and get comforted; to laugh with new friends during social moments; to experience worship in a mostly gay and lesbian setting; to hear about what's going on in the gay Adventist world; and to better understand how all of the pieces in our lives fit together into one cohesive loved-by-God whole.

Many first timers look back on their first Kampmeeting as very special moments in their lives. For many it was the first time they could let down their guard. And, yes, Kampmeeting has many other roles: it's where we educate Adventist clergy and teachers; where we make decisions and elect officers; where we recruit volunteers to help in the year to come. But I am convinced that the friendships and relationships that come out of Kampmeeting are the primary reasons why Kinship has been successful over the years.

I want to add a note of thanks to Ron Lawson. He is a wonderful man and a professor of urban studies at a New York City college. Ron organized the first Kampmeeting, arranging for the clergy to attend and meet with our early members. Ron also served as Kinship's Church Liaison for well over 15 years. His vision and energy created an event that annually pumps new life into our all volunteer organization. We thank him.

Kampmeeting is Kinship's unique version of a venerable Adventist institution. It truly helped us accomplish whatever it is we have. If you have not experienced a Kampmeeting, you are missing something. •

Finding Balm in Gilead

I dialed the wrong number. Sometimes it's just that easy. Meaning to call Karen at the office, I reached the head elder of my home church. He asked me if I knew about the Board meeting five days in the future where our congregational leadership planned to begin discipline procedures. For what? "Well", he intoned officiously, "We think it's time we took steps to keep our church pure". I know this sounds like the beginning of an Ivory Soap commercial but I was livid. Deciding that the way Karen and I looked at each other was "too loving", the pastor and the head elder had begun to take the steps to "censor" me. "Censor" is Seventh Day Adventist lingo for take away

my right to vote in church elections, hold office, or transfer my membership in good standing. I had invited the elder and his family to our church two years earlier because they were having difficulty with another church. We had invited the pastor to our church the year before that. I'd been going for 336 months. Who on earth did they think they were?

I called the conference office to investigate my options. I was told that local churches have an enormous amount of autonomy and can make these decisions, even if the local conference disagrees with them. If I was going to fight this I would have to request that the entire congregation be put under some sort of censorship. My congregation is mostly made up of retirees. I wasn't willing to do to octogenarians what I didn't want done to me. At this juncture I knew I could not simply transfer my membership. In my quandary I called Floyd. Isn't he who everyone calls in these dilemmas? (Sorry Floyd, if your phone begins to ring off the hook as a

result of this article you can transfer some of the calls over to me.) Floyd, bless his heart, did not tease me about discipline and did give me some great next step options and phone numbers.

I called the pastor of a warm hearted church who is very, very friendly to Kinship. I explained to him my dilemma. He asked me when I wanted to join. This Sabbath? Fine. Bless you too.

I'm not someone who enjoys even your average church board meeting. I almost never have the patience to listen to three hours of discussion about what color pink to paint the sanctuary. This one was giving me arrhythmias. Almost no one would look at me as they came into the room. The pastor offered up a prayer for my soul and for my willingness to submit to the church as they worked out my salvation. (Does this sound to any of you like another period of history and another, often denigrated, denomination?) The pastor then began to outline the procedure he was going to use to censor me and to describe the ways that this act would be helpful to both me and the congregation. I asked if I could speak before they got too far into this discussion. I handed over my letter of resignation from their congregation. The color creeping up the neck of both the pastor and the head elder became quite noticeable. They asked if I knew that I was giving up my membership in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Well, no, that wasn't quite how things

were happening. I told them another congregation was graciously willing to take me into their community on profession by faith. The pastor wondered how a "sister church" could go against the process of fellow believers. I told him sister churches sometime do

this when they believe the process is rigid, discriminatory, judgmental and non-Biblical. The meeting adjourned because,

by church manual, there can be no more discussion of an issue once a member has turned in a letter of resignation.

The following Sabbath, the pastor announced that I had dropped my membership in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. I politely raised my hand and corrected him, saying that my membership was safely in another congregation of the Adventist Church and that I had decided to shift it because I was concerned about the ways the leadership was treating members at this time.

This story goes on a bit...in fact it will probably go on until all of us who participate in it are dead and forgotten. I decided to share this tale so people who find themselves in similar places can know a couple of their options.

If you are about to be censored or dis-fellowshipped because of your

orientation and you want to stay a member of this denomination:

1. Give one of the Kinship Board Members a call to find the names of Kinship

friendly Seventh Day Adventist Congregations.

2. Call the pastor of the recommended congregation, tell them your situation.

Ask them if they would be willing for you to join their church by profession of faith.

3. If that congregation is willing to receive you as a member, follow the procedures they request to become a member by profession of faith.

4. The next step is to write a

Continued on page 9...

The Roads to Hell

Ben Kemena

Growing up, my family had a preoccupation with hell - or at least the pathway to it. As a child, neither heaven nor hell was clearly outlined in my mind - but I came to see heaven as impossible and hell as a nefarious boulevard. The ways to hell were legion: from guitar music in the sanctuary to the wayward passions of black pepper. Hence, as an adult, I have remained interested in hell.

Perhaps my initial step on the road to hell came when my father bought a television. It was a frightening and fearful addition to our home. My father purchased the television for the occasion of the first lunar landing. The television was placed in a locked case in our basement - for some of the saints may surely have mistaken a television for the evil lure of satanic majesty. We watched Americans walk the moon, but we couldn't dare watch Star Trek. Pity. And of course, the following year when my brother accidentally broke our television, my parents took it as a sign of the times. I simply waited in pious anticipation of Armageddon.

As a teenager, my mother despaired over the proliferation of women's cosmetics visible from church pews. She would point these out to me. My mother had a Mormon's stockpile of face creams and lotions - but she explained that these were medicinal rather than stock trade vanity. And when my mom started buying lip gloss, she justified her purchase as a lip protectant. It was only a small wee step on to lipstick - the road to hell was clearly paved by medical necessity.

At one time, the Honda Accord was given status as the Adventist Cadillac for church employees. My father really wanted one, but he couldn't quite bring himself to that brink of Hades. Instead, he bought a Honda Civic in 1982 - a car we

still sadly drive to this day. It was safer to have his peers believe in his austere propriety than betray his furtive desires for a larger car. I thought my father's decision was ridiculous, but he bowed to peer pressure. Furthermore, we couldn't own a car with air conditioning - after all, even Sister White knew no such luxury. But let me tell you, I believe she would have driven a Honda Accord EX with air conditioning and a sunroof if only to facilitate more vision and clarity.

One day at church, I heard my mother whisper to my brother, "Would you look at the rock on that Jezebel's finger!" I was expecting to see a huge diamond - but instead, I saw a tiny wedding ring with a simple stone. The Adventist church had just allowed wedding bands - but my parents saw it as wicked adornment. But lipstick goes before the fall - and today, my mother has a wedding ring that she wears everywhere except to Dorcas meetings and church services. She covers the ring line with sunless tanning cream.

Meanwhile, I grew up carrying my own vile secret sin. I knew this to be an unpardonable issue for any church potluck. One Sabbath, I was sitting in the church basement fellowship hall quietly pondering an ample serving of Worthington 209 when Lucifer entered. I realized that I'd rather dine on turkey - and oh, the shame of having such a thought in that place! I was on that slippery slope moving from vegan to lacto-ovo to levitical Adventism. Could pork and shellfish be far behind? I had already sampled my first Creole shrimp gumbo - and the gastronomic genie was out of the bottle welcoming me to the wicked gates of culinary hedonism.

Perhaps it goes without saying that I have frequented the den of media iniquity: the movie-house. My cinematic deflowering occurred with Fantasia - but found

new moral grounding watching Raider's of the Lost Ark. More Adventists lost their cinematic virginity over that movie than any other in my lifetime. Sin, thy name is Indiana Jones. Even my father went to see the flick - and he was astounded to know that others (even Nazis) knew about the Ark of the Covenant (our secret was out!).

Then, there was always the biggest elephant in any Adventist living room: sex (usually filed somewhere between Messages to Young People and Stewardship). I wasn't having much sex (and we know what Sister White says about masturbation), but that wasn't the entire problem. Some sin is overwhelmingly vocal and verbose, but my sin was usually harbored in absolute silence. Then, an opening! One day, a church deacon ribbed me about those "dirty queers" without benefit of a qualifier. Of course, wouldn't you know, I was dating his son. I thought of saying something pithy, but an earthly repose took hold and I held back. After all, I really didn't want to look into this saint's flickering eyes while delivering CPR - or worse.

So here I am now, realizing that I can sing the words of Amazing Grace to the television jingle of Gilligan's Island - and I find it absolutely fabulous! I visit with liberal Adventists who consider a glass of "real wine" with dinner a moral imperative. It is another teeny step from Uno to Bridge. I know people who mix hamburger and soybeans as filler rather than compromise. I can look a saint in the eye and discuss erectile dysfunction. I like green beans seasoned with a strip of bacon and believe in the medicinal mission of caffeine. I can say the word "homosexual" without ungodly armpit perspiration. And I don't care what anyone says: chocolate will always taste better than carob.

Roads to Hell...

I'm still not sure about heaven - but some dear Adventist saint will make sure I'm never lost on my road to hell. I have it all pictured in my mind. The road will be paved with Vegelona and music will be provided by Christian Sedition, an Adventist gay chorus. Sister White will be a goddess and I will be selling ice cubes. •

Finding Balm...

letter of resignation to your local church.

At this point it's up to you to decide how you want to build or shift your relationships with your former congregation. It can be a great opportunity to converse and study together without any threats of reprisals. The currency becomes relational instead of power based.

Whatever you decide, we wish you well and we wish you blessings. •

Health Tips

Vitamin E is vital to optimal health. Not only does it help keep bad cholesterol from sticking to artery walls and causing heart attacks, but it also helps protect your cells from potentially cancer-causing cellular damage from free radicals. Boost your intake of E with hazelnuts, sweet potatoes, peanut butter, and safflower oil, or take a supplement.... When the urge to bail on your workout creeps up, bring back your determination by picturing yourself feeling sad, sorry, and out of shape as a result. In a recent study, people who focused on the feelings of regret they would experience after ditching a workout appeared more likely than other people to follow through with their exercise plans....Diets high in vitamin C appear to decrease the risk of an inflammatory joint condition called inflammatory polyarthritis. Compared to people whose diets were highest in vitamin C, people in a study whose diets were lowest

in vitamin C had three times the risk of inflammatory polyarthritis.... Men whose diets were highest in fiber in a recent study had an 18 percent lower risk of prostate cancer compared to men in the study who ate the least fiber. Mainly fiber from vegetable sources appeared to be beneficial. Fiber rich vegetables include cabbage, broccoli, and peas.... A magnesium deficiency may cause some people to tire quickly during physical activities, according to new research. In a study of women, low magnesium levels increased the women's bodies' need for oxygen during exercise. This, in turn, could cause muscles to need more energy and thus tire more quickly.... A recent study revealed that people who ate baked or broiled fish at least once per week had a decreased risk of atrial fibrillation, a heart condition characterized by irregular heart rhythms. People who ate fried fish or fish sandwiches did not experience any reduction in risk. •

“I Counsel you to Buy of Me Gold Tried in the Fire...by the Sea”

Scarlet and orange hues from a rising sun hover over the smells of salt water, lakeside breezes, and charcoal roasting fish. Nets, teeming with fish, have been hauled into a boat that was empty after a searching night on the lake. A beloved and gentle Lord is cooking breakfast only days after the most horrifying of crucifixions and cataclysmic of resurrections. Men who had been bickering about supremacy the week before, are bonded as they haul in the sails of the fishing vessel. The day has not officially begun yet miracles are the norm of this morning.

Years later the fisherman who

painted the narrative also wrote "you do not realize you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put in your eyes so you can see". Though this quote is usually ascribed by Seventh Day Adventists to the last day church, it seems to fit Peter's journey through a morning of unexpected gifts and richness particularly well.

Impulsive, boastful, a burley man of the dockside; Peter has

been humiliated by his denial of Christ in the court of the high priest. His place as a member of the inner circle of apostles is suspect. His relationship with his co-laborers is in question. The reliability of his love is uncertain. Gold tried in the fire has been described as faith that works through love. Simon Peter's faith had wobbled the week before. Perfect love did not cast out all fear. Peter's spiritual nakedness had been unveiled. His inability to see the larger picture had been cast across a huge canvas. The man

Continued on back cover...

Kodjo



by Larry Hallock

Pronounce it KO-jo. Picture me on sunny Labadi Beach (yes, pronounce it la-body). It's on the outskirts of Accra, the capital of Ghana, on the southern coast of West Africa. And picture one vendor after another approaching me with bootlegged CDs and every kind of trinket you can imagine. I'm fairly successful warding off most of them, but the ones who seem to, uh, embody the la-body image, well, maybe I let them try to sell me a little longer. Except for Kodjo. Maybe his body wasn't what a movie director would consider to be beach material, but I engaged him in conversation for a long time. There was something about the smile in his voice that more than made up for the missing tooth in the smile on his face. Charming would be the word. And I was fascinated by his stories. We ended up talking for nearly a week.

Being schooled in Philadelphia, Kodjo lived with his family in the Ivory Coast where he was employed as an architectural engineer. Now he sleeps the nights in a foreign country, in a small makeshift shop on the beach, out of which he sells trinkets to eke a living. He is separated from everything he once knew. His life changed in the Ivory Coast when his father accepted a position as assistant to the finance minister in the unpopular government there,

against his mother's wishes. Trouble came. Rebels showed up while the extended family was holding their bimonthly get-together and mowed them down, 25 or 30 of them. Kodjo was in a different room, so escaped the bullets. A gunman found him and, apparently having run out of ammunition, beat him in the face, head and chest with his rifle and left him for dead. Kodjo was left with the missing tooth, a lung ripped by a rib and 90 days in a hospital. A neighbor had found his baby niece still alive among the bodies and took her to the same hospital. When they were released, Kodjo took his niece and walked across the Ghanaian border with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. He found a woman to keep the little girl. He can't get a room for himself because he cannot afford the three years' advance rent required by landlords. (I was skeptical of this strange requirement until I researched it on the web.) He can't even afford to buy supplies for making the trinkets he sells; his shop is almost empty. Like millions of others in any large African city, he is desperate to survive.

He stood on the beach looking at me with a smile that was one tooth short of complete. The three trinkets hanging from his neck were little purse-like coconut shells with zippered lids. He makes them by cutting off the tops of coconuts and reattaching them with zippers.

To thread one, he bores twelve holes through the body of the coconut with a red-hot wire.

Having a family in third-world countries is so expected that it generally renders single hood intolerable. When the subject of family came up, as it does in any courteous conversation with people of that culture, Kodjo didn't respond with the usual shock and disbelief that I have no wife and kids. When I asked about his, he said he was single. This shocked me. Asked why he was single, he said coolly, "Because I like men." Okaaaaay, and why are you telling me this? Homosexuality is a crime in Ghana. No one would normally make himself so vulnerable. "I just believe in telling people the honest answer when they ask," he said. Kodjo also hasn't been a believer in Christianity or religion since he had questioned religious dogma and to deal with a sexually abusive priest in his childhood. This stance is quite a feat in a city where the back of every taxi is painted with a religious slogan or Biblical snippets. Many stores have religious names, such as the "Glory of God Electrical Shop."

By late afternoon I had also learned Kodjo was once a tour guide. After he spoke in detail of the places I wanted to visit in outlying Ghana I began to consider hiring him for my road trips. We decided he would show

me around the city that night, and I decided if things continued to seem copasetic, I'd employ him as my guide. It would have been an utter impossibility to really see Accra on my own. Kodjo was worth his weight in gold. A personal guide shows you things and takes you places you'd never experience either on your own or with a group. Having a guide means I never have to fret over finding the right hotel, bargaining for taxi rides or getting on the right bus without having to study a map for an hour.

What a night it was! We went to the Paloma and dined outdoors under a thatched canopy while a live band and vocalists performed under droopy palm trees. This was the African highlife music for which Ghana was famous in the 1950s, 1960s and, I think, into the 1970s. They threw in a little reggae; including Bob Marley's "One Love". Those lyrics in that setting were quite emotional. The band played a great rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In". Somehow they had a trumpet, trombone and a soloist with Louis Armstrong's voice. I thought of my friends back home and wished they were there.

After dinner we walked a mile or two in the dark through business and residential streets teeming with people. We hiked through a seedy area known as Devil's Island because every conceivable type of low-life hangs out there. (I found myself thinking, If my friends could see me now... I sure hope they don't see me in headlines.) We finally arrived at the caf-style bar known as Strawberrys. It looks completely straight, but it's as close to a gay establishment as you can get in Ghana. Gay people meet there on the QT in spite of severe legal penalties for loving someone whose genitals just happen to look the same as your own.



The only available outdoor table was too close to the music, but the lively atmosphere was great! During our walking tour, I'd shared more of my own story with Kodjo, so he freely pointed out which of the others he knew to be gay. My gaydar would not have been able to identify them and yet they reminded me that in freedom or not, people will always find a path to some meaningful sense of joy.

At 1:00 a.m. I stepped into the shadows while Kodjo flagged a meterless taxi and negotiated a "local price" for dropping me off at my hotel and him at the beach where he sleeps. Before reaching my hotel, I told Kodjo I would be willing to replace his lost income from beach sales, and then some, if he would guide my road trips over the next several days. He was delighted. He agreed to be at my hotel by 7:00 a.m.

Kodjo and I traveled by bus. I'll leave that horror story for another time. I'll also wait to tell you the beautiful stories of Kumasi (seeing the king of the Ashantes) and Elmina (walking among the ghosts of the largest slave fort of the trans-Atlantic slave trade).

Back in Accra, I paid Kodjo. He agreed to accompany me back to the "Art Center", a dense mass of

130 shops that sell carvings and kinte cloth. Kodjo could advise me and help keep the sharks at bay. I noticed, as we walked among the shops, that he would disappear for a few moments with some of the shopkeepers. He noticed that I noticed, and explained. He had debts to pay. Now he could pay them. Now he could buy more supplies with which to make a living. His demeanor was straightforward and businesslike until he suddenly lost his cool and bubbled over with joy. "You have made me so happy! I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't met you." He really does smile with his voice when he's happy.

I had no idea when I hired Kodjo what my decision would mean to him. As we began our last meal together Kodjo reached across the table, took my hand and said a prayer. His lack of respect for religious trappings doesn't mean a disbelief in God. I don't remember the words he said. I don't think I even heard them. But I know what they meant. •



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“...in the Fire...by the Sea”

Continued from page 9...

and his relationship with his community need to be healed.

Jesus in His Infinite Wisdom begins by offering the very item we are counseled to buy. With love He feeds them. With love He begins the journey of restitution and restating. And with the gentleness of heaven He asks "Simon, do you love me more than these?". There is no boasting in the response. "Yes Lord. You know I love you." In front of witnesses. "Feed my lambs". Perhaps now Peter could be ready to care for those who are young in faith.

Again, "Simon Peter, son of John, Do you truly love me?" Where is that eye salve? Is this "rolling pebble" able to see clearly enough to begin to understand his own heart? Will he know his needs? Has he learned where he must look so he can navigate a journey through the shoals? "Yes Lord, you know I love you." A different commission comes from a deeper understanding. "Take care of my sheep". Ah yes, sheep. Odd beasts they... we... are.

Shepherds must know where the gullies lie. If a sheep falls in, they cannot right themselves and will die from starvation, predators

or exposure. The shepherd must know how to place their rod in front of a sheep so it will not fall. The shepherd must know how to use the crook to pull sheep out of depressions when they do stumble. Sheep will eat even food that kills them. Shepherds must make sure the pasture is safe. Sheep will spook and flee panicked across streams and into brambles. Shepherds must have eye salve so they will not miss a wanderer, and love to propel them across the hills in all kinds of weather. Until this point, Peter has been a fisher folk. He knows how to catch. He knows how to drag in. He knows how to hawk his wares in the market place. He is changing careers. He needs a very different set of skills.

But Jesus is not yet finished with His work of restoration. A final time comes the question "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" The Bible says "Peter was hurt when Jesus asked him and replied, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you'". Though Peter may not have understood its significance in the moment, the third affirmation replaces the third denial. Jesus is now able to tell him "feed my sheep". It is with this

affirmation of love that Peter becomes safe enough to find food that will not poison. Jesus goes on to say "When you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted. When you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you." The raiment that Christ offers may not always lead to a cross, but it always comes from one. It is a most difficult thing to give up saying "I will dress my self" and let Heaven cover us with its materials, its colors, and its form. But it was at that point in Peter's life, and I think in ours, that the restoration to self, to a relationship with God, and to the community of heaven is able to take place. The ingredients mentioned in Revelation are the prescription to make us whole.

The counsel in Revelation is the story of a journey. It is individual and corporate. Its gold is light reflecting. Its eye salve is light clarifying. Its clothing is woven with threads of the rainbow that covers the throne of life.

Blessings

