

connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 39, No. 3, May 2015



The Journey of Jerry McKay ^{p4}

*Not by books or academic discussions,
but by the people he met and their stories.*

Reinder Bruinsma about
Serving God: With all your mind ^{p10}

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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, transgender, and intersex individuals and 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 a global organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people worldwide.

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 2,500 people in more than forty-three countries.

Seventh-day Adventist 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 that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.



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or visit Kinship's website www.sdakinship.org/resources
for information about

- Find a Gay Friendly Church
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SUPPORT KINSHIP

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to SDA Kinship Int'l, PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94563 or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

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From the Editor

Story. The power of story is as old as Eden. Kinship's first Kampmeeting was, essentially, centered around, focused on, and remembered by personal stories told to other Seventh-day Adventist gay and lesbian people who gathered at a California desert camp. The church leaders who chose to attend that weekend were changed by those stories. Stories have been a focus of all Kampmeetings since. They are the central power of Daneen and Stephen's film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*. Reinder Bruinsma, an Adventist church leader and theologian, said his thoughts on LGBTI Adventists and the church were changed, not by the books he read or the academic discussions, but by the people he met and the stories he heard at a European Kinship Meeting in Holland. The pastors who attended the last European *Building Safe Places—for Everyone* meeting were appreciative of and impressed by Arlene Taylor's presentations on Sex, Gender, Orientation, and the Brain—but they asked to hear more stories at next year's meeting. In 2003, when I told Bob Bouchard I would be willing to edit the *Connection*, he impressed upon me the truth that Kinship members most wanted stories, photos, and the chance get to know each other through our media. That hasn't changed. Because you read this you know we ask you for your vignettes and your longer journeys. In this issue we begin another way of telling stories. Normally, no article in the *Connection* is longer than two or three pages. With this issue we begin to also include Jerry McKay's longer story of his journey toward wholeness as a gay Adventist man. We're including Reinder Bruinsma's most recent theological/pastoral response to the issue of LGBTI Adventists and C. Stephen's poetic response to being a gay Adventist in Jamaica. We look forward to hearing your responses. In the meantime, we will continue to ask you for your stories, short or long. They change our world. It is because of you and their importance that we always ask you to *take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.*

Catherine



Life, the Jamaican Context, 2008

Mocking smiles,
Invading our world with lies and promises of miracles,
Imitation gods bringing oppression and death through
things which already were.
Financial apartheid,
Sucking from us the common, life itself.
Bringing drought, famine, disasters that tongue or pen
fall short to express;
Shutting us out of the ark with an authority they
acquired through bribery and trickery.
And we like crabs in a barrel refuse to be martyred for
the freedom of our brothers, sisters, or children.
All because they deem the forefathers' plight
inadequate,
Must we relive the horrid fairytale; "peace battle"
they say.
Gun butts, smoke, fire, all in the name of peace;
Shaking their heads in pity and sympathy, but crossed
fingers out of sight.
The law "For the people" has been abolished, now—
Institution of a new law "To the people."
So we suffer hopelessly through it, though it didn't
have to be so.
Fate is unkind to us and all our generations
Our story is one of oppression.
However, today the whites stand blameless,
Only accounting for changing our perception of
ourselves.
Their influence seen even in our flag where hardships
are the half
The land is the other but it is no refuge,
When our own overtake us—
We could not hide in our own land
It existed almost as a betrayal giving us up to the
bloodthirsty hounds.
Soon 'twill be stained red with the blood of the
common.
There is no sunshine,
And the black clouds, menacing, stretch out their
hands, to entrap us forever in the "hardships of the
people."
We form a line for our food, for grain like those in
the mother land.
"A great depression" "Universal starvation"
So our children with pot bellies and sunken eyes stand
by our side feeble and frail,
With ambitions existing only as dreams in their mind.
Sad,
History professed that the days of genocide were over;
well,
History lied. They are here again.
So I hear my mother saying, "The more things change,
the more they remain the same."
And we look on through dark eyes, our souls in hiding.
Only waiting for the Savior to arm us for the
rebellion,
—or for the death to free us.

—C. Stephens ▼



Journey

By Jerry McKay

Most of what characterizes my life today—work, family, and faith—looks little like what I thought it would when I graduated from college in 1980. Because of my sexual orientation, nothing is as I expected. I still identify as Seventh-day Adventist, but I do not have the same relationship with my church as I once had. I am open about my orientation to most people, and I have been in a relationship for nearly twenty-five years. Don't let that fact, however, lead you to make assumptions about my theology. That I am a professing Christian is applauded by some and questioned by others. LGBT acquaintances and some heterosexual friends often ask me why I continue to associate with a faith community that has had a checkered relationship with its LGBT members. Others wonder how I can consider myself a Christian while in a relationship.

In addition to the why-do-I-continue and the how-can-I-consider-myself questions are a multitude of other questions that people have asked me over the years.

Naturally, people want to know when and how I first became aware of my orientation. Others are interested in my spiritual experience and how my faith and my orientation intersect and perhaps collide. Many questions revolve around my reparative therapy journey and how that impacted my belief in God and my relationship to the church. I am often asked about the pivotal moment I decided to stop trying to change my orientation and the events that led up to that moment. Related to that decision is the question of short- and long-term consequences. I've been asked about where I see God in the whole journey—before counseling, during counseling, and since accepting my orientation. And, finally, others want to know about my relationship, how it has evolved over the years, and the impact it has had on my life.

There are so many questions, and the best way to answer them is with a story.

To let you into my experience as deeply as possible, I'm going to tell my story in themes. While life is usually lived on a timeline moving from A to B to C, there are themes that overlap and benchmark events that change the course of our lives. This has definitely been my experience.

The themes are more significant during the first half of my life, but they do spill over into the present. They loosely follow along these lines: family dynamics, my religious world, school experiences, and my awareness of my orientation. Later I will describe my

journey into the world of reparative therapy as I tried to fix myself and become heterosexual. Finally, I will look at my life since that experience. As I move through each period, I cannot help but add experience-in-retrospect comments that explain why I felt the way I did and why I made certain choices.

When you are finished, I want you to be able to say that you now know at least one person who is attracted to the same sex and what that experience is like. By letting you into some very private moments, I want you to come as close as possible to walking in my shoes.



Part One – The First Fifteen Years

I begin with the first fifteen years of my life. Most of the things I share from childhood tie into my experience in later years as I tried to make sense of my orientation. As I begin, indulge me in sharing some of the quirky bits of my life in general as a child.

I was born in the summer of 1956 four years after my parents' marriage. I'm the first of two children. My sister was a mid-winter baby, born in February three and half years later. At the time of my birth my father, who had only eight years of formal education, was self-employed. He operated a small saw mill where he cut cedar logs into lumber and sold it to local dealers or individuals. Mom, having finished high school and then a certificate at a local secretarial college, worked part-time at a lawyer's office in a nearby town. Home was in a tiny village in rural Ontario fifty kilometers west of Canada's capital.

Our century-old house sat on the southeast corner of the only intersection in our village. If it had not been for a telephone pole sitting three feet from the corner of the house, the traffic would have eventually whittled away that last bit of lawn until we could have touched them from the living room window as they turned the corner. My bedroom overlooked that intersection. I always heard the passing traffic, and the one street light illuminated my bedroom every night.

For the first few years, we had no running water or indoor plumbing of any kind. When we finally got running water, it was only cold water. All bath water had to be heated on the electric stove in large boilers. I cannot imagine now, as an adult, existing only on a sponge bath every other day!

A wood furnace that blasted heat up through a single two-foot circular vent in the living room floor kept us warm during the winter. The iron grate in that vent could get hot enough to burn your skin, and I am told I stepped onto it once as an infant and blistered the bottom of my feet. It was a significant move upward when dad converted the wood furnace to a thermostat controlled oil furnace. I was already in elementary school when Bell Canada upgraded our operator managed party line to a "dial" phone. While my environment was rustic, there was always plenty of food on the table; and, unlike some of the neighbors, our car always started.

My free time was filled with self-made entertainment. During the summer, friends and I spent hours making up games, building tree forts in the woods around the village, and swimming in the nearby river—all unsupervised in those days. I was barefoot half of the time and would arrive home in the evening with the soles of my feet blackened from walking on gravel roads that had been soaked in used motor oil to keep the dust down. In the winter,

we traded forts in the forest for tunnels in snow drifts, and the pond we played around in during the summer became a skating rink.

As I got older, I added a few mischievous activities to my entertainment list. In addition to knocking on neighbors' doors and running away to hide, another favorite winter pastime was playing "bumpers." Under the cloak of very dark winter evenings, we would sneak out behind cars that had stopped at that one intersection below my bedroom window and grab onto the back bumper. Then, unknown to the driver, of course, we let the car pull us down the snow-packed street. As we slid along trying to stay upright while crouching behind the car, our only fear was of hitting an unexpected patch of sand on the road. If grabbing bumpers felt too risky, we opted for throwing snowballs at cars as they pulled away from that same stop sign.

Whether it was summer or winter, the highlight of my childhood was staying at my father's family farm. I share the name Alexander with at least four in a line of six decedents who arrived in Canada from Dornoch, Scotland, to settle in this area in 1832.

My father's father died in 1964, so I have only vague memories of him. I know, however, that he was an excellent fiddle player and often spent Saturday nights playing up a storm at a barn dance

somewhere in the county. My grandmother occasionally accompanied him on the piano.

After my grandfather's death, my father's brother took over the farm and lived there with his mother until she died. For years my father's saw mill was located at the farm. Dad would often spend the night at the farm instead of driving back home only to return the next day. I went with him every opportunity I could get. During the summer, at my request, dad would leave me at the farm for days on end. It was my second home, and my uncle was my second father.

My uncle taught me to drive the horses to help bring in the hay. The farm animals were my summer friends. It was a thrill to become so familiar with the cattle, sheep, and horses that they would recognize me when I approached them in the open fields and let me pet them. Some animals presented more of a challenge—the barn cats!

There were "wild" cats that hung out in the barns. I was fascinated at how my grandmother could get close to them, but no one else could. One day, after much observation, I was sure I could trick them. I put on grandmother's straw hat, one of her sweaters, and an apron. Walking slowly and hunched over as she was, I approached the barn. Sure enough, the cats came up to me expecting the table scraps they would have received from grandma. I was elated to have gotten so close to those skittish cats. That day, I learned why wolves use sheep's clothing.

I also went to the farm during the school break at Christmas. There was something magical about accompanying my uncle to feed the cattle in the evening or to milk them—by hand—in the morning. In December, both chores were done in the blackness of a December night. I remember being fascinated at how much heat twenty cows could generate. In the early morning, even if it were -30° C. out-

side, the barn was warmer than the house. Of course, the farm house was heated by one wood stove, and when the last flames went out in the middle of the night it meant you could see your breath by morning. In mid-January, the bedpan under the bed was a welcome indignity compared to a trip outside in the dark to the frigid outhouse.

During the winter months, my father and uncle used to cut the cedar trees my father would later saw into lumber. I spent the day running around gathering dead wood to keep a fire going. By contrast, if I was not outside in the bush, I might just as easily have been indoors helping my grandmother prepare dinner on the woodstove or sitting with her as she darned my uncle's woolen socks.



Jerry and his father

During the school break in March, I headed to the farm again. This time it was to help drive the horse-drawn sleigh to collect the sap from the maple trees so that it could be boiled down to maple syrup.

Being around a farm, I was well aware of some harsher realities. I knew where the meat on our table came from. I saw dead deer suspended in the shed to cure during hunting season. I watched a pig being shot and then hoisted up so it would bleed out thoroughly. On one occasion, I

helped my uncle's neighbor castrate a batch of piglets—don't ask!

My description of childhood may sound like something from the 1830s, but it was my reality in the 1960s. These aspects of my childhood were fundamental in creating my respect for animals, my comfort with the solitude of the night and the forest, and being able to find pleasure in simple things. My life is richer because of them.

There was one event from my childhood, however, that haunts me to this day.

With the pellet gun my father had given me one Christmas, I used to shoot at bottles or targets on trees. Then one day, without any forethought, I aimed at a sparrow on a distant telephone pole. I don't think I believed I would hit it, but I did. When it fell to the ground, I felt sick to my stomach. It was such a powerful moment because I did know what it said in Mathew 10:29: "...not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it."

Of course, this sparrow had fallen because of my actions. Holding that lifeless little bird in my hand, I vowed to do my best to never again needlessly or thoughtlessly harm anything. Of all the questionable things I have done in life, this one still stings my conscious. That painful experience gave me some idea of what God might feel should I be hurt or fall to the ground.



European

27—31 August 2015

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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

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Meeting

Florence, Italy





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Running through all the positives of my childhood was the strained dynamics unfolding in my family. There was the ever-widening rift in my parents' relationship. It was well underway before I was born. My parents' marriage was never strong. In fact, it was probably doomed from the beginning because of significant personality differences and the fact that my father drank regularly.

Drinking was a part of my father's culture before my parents were married. Next to fishing, it remained a popular pastime for him and his friends. My mother never liked to drink, and being rather shy and introverted found the weekend parties tedious. Soon she stopped going with him to those events, which significantly changed their social life and further strained their relationship.

Three and a half years after I was born and some seven years into my parents' marriage, Marilyn entered the world. Although she was a very welcome addition to the family, health concerns complicated everything. By my sister's first birthday, she was diagnosed with a severe congenital heart defect. In 1962, Marilyn had to be rushed to Toronto for emergency heart surgery at the Hospital for Sick Children. It was a stopgap procedure, but it gave her body the needed time to develop before a more permanent solution could be found. For the next seven years her heart struggled like an engine running on half its cyl-

inders. Because of the malfunctioning valve, she constantly lacked oxygen; and you could see it in the purple hue of her lips and finger tips.

As mystery would have it, eight years later on Valentine's Day, Marilyn had a second very successful surgery. Because of a string of complications, however, she ended up spending three months in the hospital 400 kilometers from home. Naturally, the whole event put stress on her and the family. My parents made numerous trips to Toronto together and separately. It was a costly time emotionally and financially. At that time, we had neither private health insurance nor did Canada's early public health plan cover all the costs. Each month, mom sent a small check toward paying off the bill. Understandably, this stressed my parents and prompted my father to drink even more than he may have otherwise.

Unfortunately, alcohol brought all of dad's fears, hurts, and disappointments to the surface. When drinking, dad could get rather ugly. He argued, criticized, and was often demeaning. There were numerous sleepless nights as he drank heavily into the early morning hours before passing out on the sofa. Christmas, with all the social drinking, was often chaotic; and the occasional Christmas tree came crashing to the floor.

This had a profound negative impact on all of us. It created a triangle of intimacy between my mother, sister, and me that unintentionally isolated my father. I could sense my parents' stress, of course, and this affected my relationship with my father and my mother. At the same time, dad never lost a day's work because of drinking and never had a traffic accident. Back then, drinking and driving was never questioned.

Not surprisingly, I developed a hypersensitivity to what was going on around me. When dad arrived home late at night, I could tell by the sound that the tires made on the gravel below my bedroom window how heavily he had been drinking. I could tell from subtle changes in my mother's behavior that she was sad or distressed. I could see how arguments affected my sister. As a result, I grew up fast, taking on a sense of responsibility very early—too early. I learned to bury my feelings and do without emotional support because there wasn't always enough to go around.



Religion was always part of my upbringing. Sometimes it was in the background and at other times it was up close and personal. On my father's side of the family Baptists, Anglicans, United Church of Canada, and Jehovah's Witnesses were represented. My mother's background was Anglican, although she did not attend. There were plenty of Catholics in the county, but none "in the family;" but I knew from overhearing conversations that they were "good people."

I quickly learned that doctrinal differences were fodder for squabbles and that religious belief did not guarantee civility. One time, my mother and my dad's sister's husband left the house and sat in the car while dad and his sister went at it in the house over some point of theology. Despite these religious squabbles between family members, I never heard hell fire and brimstone messages from my parents. Religion may be suspect, but God could be trusted.

My father had read the Bible regularly over the years and had strong opinions about what he believed it said rather than what people thought it said or wanted it to say. While he knew plenty of good Christian folk, he had no qualms about pointing out that too much religion made people "crazy in the head." My dad's faith was best expressed by the sayings he often repeated. "We are all under the curse of the earth," he would often say, "and you just have to make the best of it." Dad also believed just as strongly that God's mercy outweighed his wrath. My father wanted to be baptized, but because baptism was often synonymous with joining a particular church he never was. He was uncomfortable with the idea that any one group could

be "all right," as most claim to be. It saddens, and perhaps angers, me that no minister simply baptized dad into the Christian faith and then let God work out what denomination he joined or what life-style choices he might make.

Around the time I started school, I was sent to the United Church in our village, but only during the summer. Summer attendance was small, but attendance was so small during the cold winter months that it didn't warrant heating the old wooden church. It sat vacant all winter waiting for the return of spring. I don't have many memories of attending that church, although I did have a collection of lapel pins indicating I had completed several levels of Sunday school. Most memories are of the wooden pews and the smell of a building that been closed up for the winter.

My earliest memories of religious instruction are of my mother reading my sister and me the odd Bible story and patiently encouraging us to memorize The Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. I remember her occasionally singing *Jesus Loves Me* and *Away in a Manger*.

Like most people, I can only repeat the first verse of *Jesus Loves Me*, yet the words, "Little ones to Him belong; they are weak but He is strong" still move me to tears faster than any sermon. Those simple words were the seeds of my faith and the message they taught would sustain me in the future when things became profoundly confusing. Even today, when theological discussion and debate become too abstract or I become overwhelmed with trying to "do all the right things," my spiritual default is to rest in the belief that we all belong to God and that God wants every-

one to know that there is room in His house for every "little one."

In addition to all the other denominations circling about, there was one that I was not yet aware of. While no one in my family was Seventh-day Adventist, Adventism was closer to home than I realized. In fact, every Sunday morning, my father would listen to *The Voice of Prophecy*, an Adventist radio broadcast coming from far-away California. When I hear the chorus used to open the broadcast, "Lift up the trumpet and loud let it ring, Jesus is coming again," I can still see my father sitting in his chair listening to the radio preacher *H.M.S. Richards, Sr.* as the smell of bacon cooking filled our home. Eventually, I would learn that dad liked many of the things he heard on those programs, that my parents knew people in the community who were Adventist, and that there were Adventist books in the house that had been given to my parents. I later learned that my mother's father had also been reading Adventist literature for years.

For years, however, Adventism was just in the background. Then, when I was eight, in a move that seemed out of the blue, my mother took my sister and me to the nearest Adventist church on Easter of 1964. It was a small congregation founded, in fact, after a series of evangelistic meetings in 1920 by the same radio preacher my father listened to each Sunday morning. I had no idea that on that morning this faithful little group would become my permanent spiritual home. We went to church every Saturday morning after that. This was a pivotal moment in my life.

My sporadic Sunday school attendance was replaced with regular Sabbath school

attendance. Saturday morning became the highlight of my week. My children's class with its songs and felt-board Bible stories became a weekly sanctuary from all that was chaotic and stressful at home.

In the next few years, on my own initiative, I embraced the key theological and lifestyle markers of the Adventist church. That meant I was seen as a bit of an odd-ball among relatives. Going to church on Saturday was odd enough, but becoming a vegetarian, in the mid-60s in meat-eating rural Ontario, was viewed with suspicion. I know folk, even my father, thought I would soon fade away to nothing or drop dead at any moment. That a Christian did not drink was not that unusual, but dropping tea and coffee from my diet was a bit fanatical for most.

My opposition to drinking often annoyed my father and created a lot of tension between us as I grew older. When Dad reminded me that the statement "a little wine for thy stomach's sake" was from the Bible, I reminded him that the Bible also said "wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging." There were plenty of heated arguments about the definition of what "a little wine for thy stomach's sake" meant. These arguments got us nowhere. There was always more heat than light, and I regret any element of those arguments that implied I was a better person than he.

On a humorous note, Dad used to irritate visiting pastors who encouraged him to "give up the drinking." Once they had counseled him, he would ask them to tell him what faithful Noah did shortly after coming out of the ark. I know it galled them to admit that one of the Bible's greats planted a vineyard and made wine and then drank it. There was no winning the wine argument. And of course, dad knew what Jesus had done with the water!

Becoming involved with any church opens doors and opportunities one might never have otherwise. One of the early highlights for me was going off to summer camp.

Going to a Christian camp was a high for me. It seemed so perfect—everyone working together to do and be like Jesus. I threw myself into every activity and when each week came to an end, I did not want

to go home. When I got home, I slept for days out of exhaustion.

One example illustrates my attitude during those summer camp days. While most kids enjoy camp just for the fun of it, and a few spend their time looking for opportunities to make trouble, I set my sights on becoming King of Camp! That honor required a week of exemplary conduct, but I was up for the challenge. Perhaps I was trying to please others out of a need for praise and attention. Maybe the order and conformity it required gave me a sense of control in my life. Whatever the reason, I was able to meet the challenge and was crowned King of Camp one summer. I was sure I was doing just as Jesus would have wanted.

Although regular church attendance provided a social outlet, I did not see much of my friends outside of church because everyone was spread out over the county. Most friendships were from the village where I lived; I saw them only at school.

Whether it was at home or at school, most aspects of my life were becoming compartmentalized. That included my faith experience. Although it dominated my thinking, it was becoming a very private and solitary matter. I would shut myself away in my room or hide up in a large Manitoba Maple tree beside the house to read my Bible, talk to Jesus, or complete the Bible studies I received by mail from that Adventist radio broadcast in California. I did read the odd Hardy Boys mystery book, but I spent more time methodically working my way through *The Desire of Ages*, a 600-page devotional by Ellen G. White on the life of Jesus.



The high point of my spiritual journey was the day I was baptized in 1969. Since the Adventist church practices baptism by immersion, we had to go into Ottawa where there was a functional baptismal tank. Walking down into the water and being totally immersed by my pastor was a profound bodily experience.

My interest in all things religious did have its positives and negatives.

On the positive side, lifelong attitudes were being shaped by my meditation on the example and teachings of Jesus. I was drawn to the way He related to people, and I wanted to be like Him. On the negative side, my adolescent enthusiasm lacked experience and I tended toward Pollyanna-like expectations. While I did not intend to be judgmental or legalistic, I struggled with the fact that others did not always do what God wanted, as I understood it. In my 12-year-old mind, I knew that if everyone did what God wanted, parents would not argue, everyone would be a vegetarian, relatives would go to church on Sabbath, and everything would be right in the world. I was left puzzled when God did not answer every earnest prayer. Had God done so, my sister's worldly nail polish would have curdled in its bottle, the TV would have stopped working Friday evening as the sun set, and Jesus would have turned my father's wine back into water.

All of this was in contrast to what other friends were up to. While most of my male friends were out playing sports, experimenting with cigarettes, alcohol, and learning about the female anatomy from their father's magazines, I read my Bible and thought about how to give Bible studies to the neighbors.

Kinship Europe Holiday

August 31—September 7
Priello luxury Farmhouse
with gorgeous swimming pool
registration & information

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To be Continued... ▼

Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

Serving God: With all your mind

By Reinder Bruinsma

We all know the famous words of Christ, "Let the children come to me" (Luke 18:16). And we realize that this text has often been used and abused. Many preachers have taken this text as the basis for a sermon about the simplicity of the gospel and have told their church members, "You must *believe* the gospel message and accept it as a child. You do not need to *understand* it. Too much thinking will only lead you into trouble and make you doubt."

Yes, many Christians have been suspicious of intellectual endeavors and of the findings of modern science. Many have tried to separate faith from science and have said, "If what I believe conflicts with what I learn from science, I must choose my faith and abandon science." Most Adventists, fortunately, have not gone to that extreme. In fact, we have had a tradition of emphasizing education.

The Adventist Church worldwide operates one of the largest Protestant educational networks. Adventists believe in education. We tend to enjoy our upward mobility. The Adventist bookkeeper dreams that his son/daughter will become a medical doctor or dentist. The Adventist school teacher hopes her daughter will be a university professor.

The profile of the church has changed. I remember that in my childhood in The Netherlands there were very few professional people in the Adventist Church. We had two or three medical doctors, one lawyer, and a handful of teachers. Today there are hundreds of people with university training of some kind. The same is even truer for the church in many other countries.

This is certainly an enormous enrichment for the church, yet often also a source of tensions. Many who have gone to university have met elements in their study that they found difficult to fit into

their Christian/Adventist perspective. Many find some facts about life that are supported by science difficult to reconcile with their Adventist faith. Some facts about homosexuality and related issues fall in this category.

All of it

A love relationship with God has different components. It involves the heart and the soul. It has to do with feelings and emotions, with total commitment, perseverance, and will power. But it also has to do with our mind. *With all your mind*. When we speak of discipleship, we must include *discipleship of the mind*. There should not be any gap between the heart and the mind, as if a believer cannot be a thinker!

Here many Christians face a major challenge. The famous British philosopher Bertrand Russell once remarked, "Most Christians would rather die than think. In fact they do." This has been especially true in evangelical circles. The issue may be best summed up in the title of a book that created quite a stir: *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, by Mark Knoll (Eerdmans Publishers, 1994).

Many evangelical Christians have argued that too much knowledge is risky. Did not Paul say that knowledge puffs up (1 Corinthians. 8:1, 2) and that it tends to lead to arrogance and loss of faith? I

believe Paul certainly did not mean that all thinking is negative and ill-advised. He did not oppose *good* thinking, but *inaccurate* thinking, or a thinking that cannot detach itself from tradition and prejudice. Paul wanted us to be intentional in our thinking. *Think about things that are excellent and praiseworthy*, he said (Philippians 4:8). And, *whatever you do, do it to the glory of God*. So, use your mind to the glory of God.



I came across another challenging book about the lack of thought among many evangelical Christians: *Fit Bodies Fat Minds* (Baker Books, 1994). Many modern Christians, Os Guinness argues in this book, have toned up their bodies, but dumbed down their minds. This may well be a relevant message for many Adventists. We emphasize health, good care for our body, and good food. We are continuously reminded that we are stewards of our body, which we should regard as a temple of God. We hear sermons about this theme and read about it in our journals. But when



did you last hear a sermon or read an article in one of our journals on the need to also have a sound mind? And about thinking in a consistently Christian way?

A Christian mind

A Christian mind is no luxury. It is part of the abundant life that Christ promised us. We need a new heart and a new spirit if we want to be disciples of Christ. But Paul also spoke of the need for the *renewal of our minds* as part of our Christian growth.

Let us explore this concept of a Christian mind a bit further. I would like to share some principles about serving God with all of our mind and I invite you to share these with other people.

1. The first aspect we should underline is the need for *humility*. We should tell ourselves and other people: When you have a decent education (especially just after receiving your diploma or degree), there may be a sense of elation, of superiority: You now know so much more than many other people do. But let us not forget that the early stages of the process of acquiring knowledge are full of pitfalls. It is so easy to jump to conclusions. We must recognize that we do not know everything. In fact, we will often be overwhelmed by how much more there is to know, and how little we in fact do know, even in our own discipline. When we meet truly great minds we sense our own deficiencies and our need to grow. Each discovery opens up new fields where we are total strangers. So remain humble and avoid any arrogance.
2. We tell ourselves and the people we associate with: you must always *keep on learning*. Not only from books but also from experiences, from life, from all sorts of people—colleagues, peers, and also from common folks. Appreciate their wisdom and insights. Adventist thought leaders, in particular, must learn a lot from the “simple” people in the church, who have not had the privilege of attending a university. After all, Christ, the greatest Teacher of all times, never attended a formal university. They must realize they often learn most by talking to “ordinary” people

and by mingling with them. This certainly applies to acquiring more knowledge and insights regarding homosexuality, same-sex relationships, etc.

This was my experience.

Some years ago I was invited to a Kinship meeting to present a number of worships. It was the first time I spent quality time with people with a “different” sexual orientation. I had the opportunity to talk with them and to hear their stories. It was an extremely valuable experience. I left with many questions. I still have some. But I learned much and realized: I will have to think this through further and will probably have to change my mind. (And in recent years I did change my mind in many respects!)



Keep asking questions

3. We must tell ourselves and other people: If you want to develop further as a thinking Adventist and want to serve God with all your mind, you must *dare to ask questions*. Your mind will develop no further if you think you already have all the answers.

This was the genius of early Adventism—going beyond accepted opinion, being prepared to think outside the box, to ask new questions—to go on new paths, uncertain where they would lead.

Serving God with our whole mind is a lifelong adventure, and we cannot be sure where it leads. This idea is worrisome to many people. Truth, they are convinced, is absolute. It is something you inherit, and something that has been long- and well-established. What is right or wrong has been settled a long time ago.

However, we must challenge ourselves and other people: Be inventive and innovative and open. We must realize: *Our view of the truth is never the final truth.*

There is always more to discover. And you will only discover by asking questions.

We must realize: We cannot be a theologian or social scientist or any kind of thinking intellectual if we refuse to ask questions—even troubling questions:

- about the nature of the Bible;
 - about the origin of the world and man;
 - about the origin and nature of evil;
 - about matters of life and death;
 - yes, and also about issues like homosexuality, same-sex relationships, etc.
4. We must also tell ourselves and others: *Dare to live with unanswered questions!* You will never get answers to all your questions. Do not let this worry you unduly or lead you to despair. You are just a creature, while He is the Creator. Only God knows all the answers. You will always know only in part.

I have at times felt overwhelmed by questions, even by serious doubt. But I have found it a good practice to tackle one problem at a time. I try to concentrate my thinking and reading on some particular issue and try to shelve other issues until later. I will not ignore them but will postpone dealing with them, and will only deal with them one by one. That has worked well for me. But when everything is said and done, we must stand ready to confess and dare to say: Lord, it is okay. I do not know. And I must not feel ashamed if I have to tell others: I simply do not know.

5. We must tell ourselves and others that we must be *prepared to change our mind*. A Christian mind grows over time but realizes it will never be perfect or inerrant. Someone once said: When one is right in fifty percent of all cases, that's very good. When one is right sixty percent of the time, that is wonderful. When someone says he/she is 100 percent right, he (or she) is almost certainly a fanatic.

We must challenge ourselves and others to honestly accept that we may have been wrong in holding certain views, and we must be willing to change our mind when the evidence demands it.

6. There is a further challenge: It sounds somewhat contradictory, but those who are leaders and have influence,

may not be perfect in their thinking, but must nonetheless be a thought leader.

Serving God with all our mind means that we want to be open to the great Source of wisdom. As we drink from that Source we develop ideas, we generate vision, we are able to share and give direction. We must, however, remind ourselves and others: Always be responsible and gentle with others, who may need more time before they are able to change their minds. Be a leader, but do not run so far ahead that people no longer see you.

7. As we serve God with all our mind, we must be ready to often live in a *creative tension* with others. We must understand that, as we ask the people to allow for the space to question things and debate issues, some tensions may arise; try to deal with those with patience, tolerance, and love.
8. There is another, vital, aspect I want to stress. We must tell ourselves and others, *As you serve God with all your mind, pray that you will never sacrifice your intellectual integrity. Never sell your soul. Never change your convictions in order to get a position or to be*

popular. Never succumb to the temptation to believe one thing in church and another thing at work.

Love is all-important

9. Finally: We must challenge ourselves and others: Never separate the life of the mind from *genuine spirituality*. We may know a lot about the Christian religion, without having a living relationship with Christ. We may know a lot about the way human beings interact and society operates, without having a real love for people. We must seek to convince ourselves and our brothers and sisters: in all our discussions, study, debate, arguments—make sure it happens in an atmosphere of love for one another. And make sure that the conclusions you arrive at are conditioned by genuine love.

I picked up an important message from the movie *Seventh-Gay Adventists*. People may need time to think through how the Bible and the core of Adventist teachings relate to the issue of homosexuality. They may be in doubt what to do in the actual praxis of church life, especially when they must make decisions that affect their per-

sonal life and that of their family and friends. If I am going to err—a pastor said in that movie, when asked to be involved in the blessing of a relationship between two men—I will err on the side of compassion. Serving God with all our mind is *loving* God. Love must always be the dominating factor.

Serving God with our minds is an essential part of our *discipleship*. But it does not operate in a vacuum. There must always be a close relationship between knowing and doing, believing and obeying. Certainly, we are asked to love the Lord with our minds, but *not only* with our minds. We must serve him with all we have and are: with our minds, but also with our hearts and soul.

Do I dare to end with a quote from a Catholic author? I will risk it. Cardinal Newman once wrote: “Your whole nature must be reborn, your passions and your affections, and your aims, and your conscience, and your will, must all be bathed in a new element, and re-consecrated to your Maker, and last, but not the least, your intellect.” (*Apologia pro Vita Sua*, 191). ▼

SDA Kinship Kampmeeting July 14-19, 2015

**Kellogg West Conference Center & Lodge,
Pomona, CA USA**

Information and registration at

<https://sdakinship.org/events/sda-kinship-kampmeeting.html>





Club 122 LONGEVITY™

©Arlene R. Taylor PhD (www.arlenetaylor.org)

The woman swept through my open office door like a mild—or not so mild—hurricane.

"What's all this business about living to be 100?" she demanded, huffily. "My mother died when she was 79; her sister at the age of 75; her brother when he was only 70. Live to be a 100? Give me a break! Maybe in some antediluvian world but not today. How can you even tell people that? Nobody lives that long now!" She plumped herself into a chair, folded her arms across her chest, and glared at me.

Her name tag read "Jean," so I smiled and said, "Let me tell you about Jeanne Louise Calment." And I proceeded to do just that.

Jeanne was born fourteen years before Alexandre Gustave Eiffel built the Eiffel Tower (she remembered seeing the Eiffel Tower being built) and a year before Alexander Graham Bell patented his telephone. In 1888 when she was 13 years old, she met Vincent van Gogh when he came into her father's fabric shop to buy some canvas. In 1896, at the age of 21, she married Fernand Nicolas Calment, her double second cousin. Unfortunately, Fernand died in 1942 at the age of 73 after eating a dessert prepared with spoiled cherries, so the story goes. Many years later when the press asked Jeanne about her long life she reportedly quipped: "I had to wait 110 years to become famous. I wanted to enjoy it as long as possible."

When she died in 1997, Michel Vauzelle, the Mayor of Arles, said: "She was Jeanne the Arlesienne, one whose picture went around the world. But above all, she was the living memory of our city."

"Here is a picture," I told Jean, booting up my computer. "Club 122 Longevity was named in honor of Jeanne Louise Calment. Her life of 122 years, 164 days, demonstrates the old adage, *You'll get farther if you aim higher*. Members of Club 122 Longevity are committed to aiming higher. Continually learning, they turn what they learn into knowledge and then daily apply that knowledge on a practical basis to create and maintain a Longevity Lifestyle."

The woman unfolded her arms and sighed. "They were all very heavy when they died, my mother, my aunt, and my uncle. I'm heavy. I'd love to live longer than they did—hanging onto my health and my brain's marbles—but I don't have a clue how to do that."

"Everything starts and ends in the brain," I said. "All things being equal, the health and functionality of the brain impact the health and functionality of the body. Together, brain and body, impact a person's weight. These three basic components—brain,



body, and weight—collaboratively and interactively impact each other.¹⁾

"Metaphorically, consider traffic: vehicles create traffic, which either facilitates or impedes vehicles. In much the same way, the brain directs most of what goes on in the body. What goes on in the body can facilitate or impede the action of the brain. Your weight results from a combination of brain-body interactions. In turn, a weight that is too low (think anorexia) or a weight that is too high (think overweight and obesity) adversely impacts both brain and body. The deleterious effects of obesity on your brain can increase your risk for any number of disease processes and illnesses, including diabetes type 2 and dementia.

"Back to Jeanne, reportedly neither athletic nor fanatical about her health, she nevertheless was active. She kept moving, pursuing hobbies such as tennis, cycling, swimming, roller skating, piano, and opera. Physical activity and brain stimulation are key to health and longevity."

"But I don't like to walk or swim or play tennis," said Jean.

"And I snack all evening while I watch TV," said Jean.

"I guess you'll have to decide what is most important to you," I said. "Immediate short-term rewards to feel momentarily better by taking the way of least resistance or getting in gear with a Longevity Lifestyle for a long-term reward."



Jeanne Louise Calment

Born February 21, 1875 and died August 4, 1997
in Arles, Bouches-du-Rhône, France.

"122 years?" the woman asked. "So was she bedridden or what?"

"Hardly," I replied, laughing. "Here are some longevity trivia about Madame Calment:

"In 1960 at age 85, Jeanne Louise took up fencing.

"She continued to ride her bicycle until her 100th birthday.

"After her husband's death, she lived on her own until shortly before her 110th birthday. About that time, due to complications with sight, she started a small fire in her house and the decision was made to move her into a nursing home.

"Calment continued to walk until she was nearly age 115, when she fell and fractured her femur, an accident that required surgery. After that she needed to use a wheel chair.

"Jeanne Louise remained mentally competent until the day she died."



"If you've never seen a birthday cake with 117 candles," I said, "Take a look at this." I scrolled down to another picture on my computer. "Jeanne Louise Calment at her 117th birthday party." (See www.grg.org/JCalmentGallery.htm)

"Oh, my, goodness!" exclaimed Jean. "I'll take one of those books, *Longevity Lifestyle Matters—Keeping Your Brain, Body, and Weight in the Game*. I've been aiming far too low!" she said.

"Many people have been aiming far too low. They also tend to miss how those three basic components—brain, body, and weight—exert a continually interactive and collaborative impact on each other."

I told Jean about *Club 122 Longevity*. "Join!" I suggested. "The website is being built. Take advantage of the additional information and resources available ongoing. Invite your family members and friends to join with you."

"I will," Jean replied. "What should I aim for?"

"Aim for living younger for longer," I suggested. "Personally, I'm aiming for at least 122 years, 164 days—with good mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health." ▼

Book and the Beach Mini-Kampmeeting

Sep 30-Oct 4
Nags Head
North Carolina

Information & registration www.sdakinship.org

www.Club122Longevity.com

¹⁾ The *Club 122 Longevity* logo was designed to illustrate this continual three-way collaborative. The triangle form itself has a rich and complex history. Portrayed as a simple shape of three lines and three points, the triad form is reputed to have been significant to every advanced civilization across the history of time. To some it represents the trilogy that makes existence possible; others tout it as the perfect form. Triangular examples abound, from the pyramids of ancient Egypt to transportation bridges to the Louvre Museum's glass guardian to slices of pizza, pie, and cherry turnovers—not to overlook its impact in mathematics, art and architecture, jewelry, and percussive instruments in the best symphonies.



Indeed, the triangle is here to stay. So is *Club 122 Longevity*. May its members flourish in all aspects of optimum function—brain, body, and weight—aiming higher and getting farther for as long as humanly possible on this planet.

[Health Tips]

3 Superfoods for a Long Life

By Mehmet C. Oz, MD and Michael F. Roizen, MD

Prevent dementia, clear your arteries, and live longer with this trio of great-for-you edibles: apples, pecans, and fish!

That's right. You can get triple the anti-aging benefits when you make these three superfood staples in your diet:

Apples for a longer life. Another reason to eat one each day: Well-washed apples are full of cell-protecting plant substances called polyphenols that can increase life spans by 10 percent. Apples could help you live longer, too. Why? Polyphenols neutralize free radicals that would otherwise damage your DNA in ways that accelerate aging. Stress less to protect your DNA from age-related damage.

Eat fish to fight dementia. Omega-3 fatty acids from salmon, trout, and canned light tuna help reverse brain changes triggered by a gene that increases dementia risk. Because 15 percent of humans carry the gene, it's a great reason to eat these good fats. Do this three times a week to enhance memory and brain function.

Pecans for clean-as-a-whistle arteries. Turns out this tasty nut is rich in gamma-tocopherols, a type of vitamin E that works to keep lousy LDL cholesterol from clogging your arteries with plaque.

From the President's Desk

April 2015



Last weekend was the spring board meeting for SDA Kinship International. Obed and Marcos hosted us at their home outside of Oakland, California, and we're so grateful to them. When we can hold our meetings at members' homes, it really helps keep the cost of board meetings low. Other Region 8 members also hosted board members in their homes so people from out of town didn't have to pay for hotel rooms. Because,

at the moment, the majority of Kinship board members and leaders live in the Bay Area of California, it's the most economical place for us to hold board meeting. Karen, our treasurer, is pleased that our precious donations can be used for important Kinship projects instead of administration costs.

As I've shared with you before, we typically schedule one of our three annual board meetings for the Sunday morning after Kamp-meeting ends and have another via WebEx, a virtual meeting program. This leaves the third meeting, which is face-to-face and during the year. However, this year we're working on Kinship's strategic plan and have found it very difficult to do this virtually via email or WebEx.

So we met face-to-face last week. We began our board meeting immediately after breakfast and worked until it was time to have church. I'm so grateful for Marcos and the Church 1.0 community and for Marcos' ministry as Kinship's chaplain. We enjoyed some food and fellowship with some of the other Region 8 members and friends who came to join us on Sabbath, and it was wonderful to hear their updates. But all too soon, it was time to reconvene our meeting.

We hoped to complete regular board meeting items on Sabbath so that we could take all of Sunday to work on our strategic plan. I can't even express how much I admire all the board members and leaders who stayed engaged even though it was 10:00 p.m. before we finished! That's dedication!

On the second day of our meeting, we looked at where Kinship has come from, what we've accomplished, and where we go from here. Are our goals the same as they once were? How have they changed? Whereas we might once have wanted to change the church's opinion towards our community, it is now far more important that we know ourselves and our value, and our members can be affirmed regardless of the opinions of the church. We would be happy to talk with the church leadership, yet the General Conference refuses to speak with us even while it makes pronouncements about us. And so our responsibility is to speak for ourselves and share accurate information with those willing to learn. We need not always react to the denomination's misinformation or disrespect.



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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.

I could say so much more about board meeting and the strategic plan. You'll have an opportunity to comment on the proposed revisions later this summer. For now, I really want to affirm Kinship's volunteer leaders. Each has at least a full-time job, and some work with more than one non-profit organization, too. But Kinship is about community and family. Because we care, we travel for meetings and Kinship events, we sleep on cots or futons, mostly without our partners, and we put in very long days of meetings to get Kinship's work done well.

On Saturday night, we finished at 10:00 p.m. On Sunday, we had a 12-hour workday and worked through lunch. And while there were headaches, migraines, sore bodies, and some differences of opinions, we kept at it for the good of this organization. We persevere in serving Kinship because we believe in our community and we care about each other. And we're working strategically to make sure that this organization can keep serving all of us.

Yolanda Elliott, President
SDA Kinship International
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Impressions from the Kinship Germany Meeting in March

