

connection

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What a privilege to be here on the planet to contribute your unique donation to humankind. Each face in the rainbow of colors that populate our world is precious and special.

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Who we are...

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

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

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

Support Kinship

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

SDA Kinship, P.O. Box 49375, Sarasota, FL 34230-6375, or call toll-free in the U.S. 866-732-5677 or toll from outside the U.S. 01 (941) 371-7606, or visit SDA Kinship's Web Site at: www.sdakinship.org.

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School of Life

Noel Thorpe - Australia

I was born at Christmas time. I am the first of four, in what we call a family. I grew up in the country of Queensland, one of the Eastern States of Australia. When I was 12 we moved to a large town Toowoomba.

Moving from the country to the city wasn't too dramatic because my family was always on the move. My father was a Sheep Station manager. He did not stay long in any one place.

My school years were done on the hop. I did not go to a proper school till I was eight. I did grade one and two on Correspondence; my mother was the teacher. Later, I went to St. Joseph's a Catholic Convent school, for three years. The nun's were very dedicated. I spent my best years at school there.

When we moved to the city I was able to go to my mother's Seventh day Adventist church and to Pathfinders. My father was a non-practicing Catholic and did not oppose our attendance there. I was grounded in Uncle Arthur's ten books of Bible stories. I think they were the best thing to offer children back then. Because of my Catholic school, today I am still a member of both churches. I never asked either religion to take me off their roll.

In my conservative household, the words homosexual, queer or faggot were never mentioned. They were certainly never mentioned at my Catholic school. In the 1960s, there were fights at school, but not over anyone being called queer. I do have an early memory of hearing sheep shearers talk about being queer; having their way with a younger roustabout in the shearing sheds. My father told my brother and me to stay away from the sheds, but you know what boys are like. I do remember being more interested in older boy's and men's sexual bits than girl bits. At ten I became infatuated with one of the property owner's children. He was twenty. My first experimental sexual encounter with boys was at Pathfinders. There was a lot of this kind of behavior in the group of us adolescent boys who grew up together but it was brushed under the carpet. No one discussed it.

I was fifteen when I finished school in 1970. I moved to Brisbane, the capital of Queensland and



began to live with my grandmother, a strict Seventh Day Adventist. I was offered a position as a milliner with a hat manufacturer. I moved back in with my parents when they came to Brisbane a few months later.

People told me that I was gay before I even knew what the word was. I had a difficult time coming to terms with the mix of my orientation and my religion. During the 1970s there was little support from the gay community and none from the church. I

don't think having an Adventist background helped; in some ways it has had a negative effect on my life in general. I tried to kill myself. Clearly, I am still here. I am glad to say that God has better plans for me. I carry baggage from my life, but we all do. I have a long way to go, but I am getting there with God's grace.

I needed to get away from both my church family and my biological family. The Adventist Hospital in Sydney gave me this opportunity and employed me in the laundry in 1980. I worked there a few months, trying not to be gay; burning the candles at both ends. I began to hear of other gay Adventists but I never got to meet them. Like so many people in that era, I thought I was the only gay person in "the village".

In 1981 I saw an article on SDA Kinship International in a local gay paper, the Sydney Star. I contacted a fellow who lived in one of our southern states, Victoria. I wrote to the USA and got a contact in Sydney. I knew of Ron Lawson when he was in Queensland. Because Ron was the choir master at one of my family churches, he knows some of my aunts.

I met my partner, Mervyn, in a Sydney wine bar 25 years ago. We didn't experience stars or fireworks at that time but we dated for three months, moved in together and have built a relationship over these years. We have lived out the commitment we made then; in good times and in more difficult ones. We've worked hard to create our life together and I wonder if the work has been more difficult because

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What is Our Purpose?

Isis Montalvo- Maryland, USA

The New Year frequently brings new commitments, renewed commitments or the favorite “re-cycled” commitments. You know the ones I'm referring to; they come around every year, never quite lasting the entire twelve months. They show up on the doorstep in January and visit for a little while. Those commitments can give us a “fresh start” or a renewed sense of purpose of what we would like to happen in our lives.

Rick Warren, minister of the Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California and well-known author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *The Purpose-Driven Church* raises and discusses the soul searching question: “What on earth am I here for?” In his book, he outlines the following five purposes: 1) We were planned for God's pleasure, so your first purpose is to offer real worship. 2) We were formed for God's family, so your second purpose is to enjoy real fellowship. 3) We were created to become like Christ, so your third purpose is to learn real discipleship. 4) We were shaped for serving God, so your fourth purpose is to practice real ministry. 5) We were made for a mission, so your fifth purpose is to live out real evangelism. The concepts of a purpose driven life and a purpose driven church are valuable tools.

Organizations are successful when they have a purpose because it provides a “True North” for the organization. Measurable plans support this purpose. Management gurus, such as Peter Drucker or Peter Senge, contribute to the knowledge base of organizational management and suggest that organizations express their purpose in their Mission Statements.

Two years ago, The Kinship Board embarked on a journey to better outline our organizational purpose, define our mission statement and establish a strategic plan. We utilized a consultant and formed a Strategic Planning Committee. The consultant generously donated his time to the Board. He was part of the Strategic Planning Committee, comprised of the Strategic Planning Coordinator, Kinship's Vice-President, Kinship's Office Manager and IMRU Coordinator. The team and the Board used the guidelines outlined in *The Drucker Foundation Self-Assessment Tool, Revised Edition* (Drucker, 1999). The workbook outlined steps for non-profit organizations to evaluate who they are and the actions or contributions for which they want to be remembered.

The team reviewed existing information. We surveyed Kinship members for their opinions of the services Kinship provided and how meaningful they were to the people surveyed. This survey was distributed to all members via mail and e-mail in February 2006. Based on the survey results and the Drucker criteria, a mission statement was drafted and presented to the Board of Directors in March 2006. The survey results were also utilized by the Board to create organizational goals. Four goals were outlined for the strategic plan and sub-committees then formed to create objectives for the goals.

The Board reviewed the proposed strategic plan in July at the 2006 Kampmeeting in Orlando, Florida. The plan was then presented to the attending membership and adopted. Members were asked at Kampmeeting and at the Region Coordinators workshop what Kinship meant to them. This additional analysis, coupled with the organizational self-assessment, directed the final revision of the Mission Statement. The ninth draft became the final version approved by the Kinship Board in October 2006.

The result of this two year process is our Mission Statement and Strategic Plan, designed to reflect who we are, what we want to be remembered for and activities that are important to support our members. This is our report.

Mission Statement: Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International provides a safe spiritual and social community to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex current and former Adventists.

The *Strategic Plan* included four goals and ways to address them.

1. Transform the attitudes within the Adventist community. To do this we plan to: a) Identify current attitudes/beliefs among SDAs through a pilot study. b) Conduct intensive 'outreach' based on the results of the study. c) Increase awareness of SDA Kinship in SDA communities. d) build SDA Kinship's straight “Ally List”. e) Utilize and maintain the Kinship Advisory Board to provide strategic recommendations and support for related special projects.
2. Foster community through effective internal and external communication systems utilizing appropriate technologies. To do this we plan to: a) Develop an automated, web

enabled, membership record database b) Refine current online communication tools to facilitate ease of use. c) Systemize an action response procedure. d) Identify and utilize communication resources to reach key stakeholders.

3. Ensure continuity of programs and services by enhancing the long-term financial security of SDA Kinship. To do this we plan to: a) Obtain grants from GLBT supportive foundations. b) Increase membership contribution c) Recognize and acknowledge key donors d) Establish program to encourage bequests e) Hire part-time staff person f) promote membership sponsorship of specific projects.
4. Better serve members by modifying and strengthening programmatic and organizational infrastructures. To do this we plan to: a) Strengthen Front line Leadership. b) Assess effectiveness of leadership training in regions. c) Hire a paid employee to assist the Office Manager in meeting the administrative needs of the organization d) Begin the dialogue of investigating organizational infrastructure to meet the needs of the international members. e) Establish a Bylaw Revision Committee.

Each goal has a committee and respective chairperson who is responsible for following up with and facilitating the work of the goals and objectives and reporting back to the Board. The Strategic Plan is a living document that changes, as needs change for the organization and its members. This is a long-term plan that will be monitored by the Board on a quarterly basis.

Here are the people who have served or who are serving on each committee:

Strategic Planning: Taylor Ruhl, Brenda McColpin, Jeremy Brown, Fred Casey, Naveen Jonathan, Isis Montalvo as Coordinator. And, with much appreciation, we thank our generous consultant, Andrew Pang.

Transforming Attitudes within the Adventist Community: Elena Thomas- Blough, Carrol Grady, Leif Lind, Marcos Apolonio and Jeremy Brown as Chair.

Internal and external communication systems: Yolanda Elliott, Floyd Poenitz, Suzy Wise, Mike Richart, Natalie Clothier, Robb Crouch, Russ McLaughlin, and Scott Tetley as Chair.

Development of Long Term Financial Security: Taylor Ruhl, Brenda McColpin, Karen Wetherell, and Dave Ferguson as Chair.

Strengthening Infrastructures: Fred Casey, Bruce Harlow, Naveen Jonathan, Obed Vazquez-Ortiz, Catherine Taylor and Bob Bouchard as Chair.

Bylaws Revision: Marsha Powers, Scott Tetley, Naveen Jonathan, Bob Bouchard and Bruce Harlow as Chair.

There will be many opportunities for Kinship members to be involved in supporting this work. You may be aware of or have participated in some of the activities already. The January 2006 workshop on Homosexuality facilitated increasing awareness of SDA Kinship in SDA communities, and the subsequent published book is another vehicle to share those stories. Although the development of the workshop was in process prior to the establishment of our strategic plan, it represents a need that had been identified and subsequently our goals are in alignment with our members and organizational needs. The Regional Coordinator Workshop, held in September 2006, was provided to meet one of the objectives in Goal #4 - Infrastructure - "Strengthen Frontline Leadership". The workshop provided tools and valuable information to the coordinators so they may better serve our members. And these are only two examples of the work being done that will ultimately support our members and assist us to fulfill our Mission. There is much work to do in this very exciting time for our organization. We have the opportunity to reach our targeted community and better support our members.

As I think about Pastor Warren's 5th purpose - "We were made for a mission..." I think of how each and every one of us has a purpose and a personal mission to fulfill. Our ability to fulfill that is dependent on our personal relationship with God, with ourselves and with others. Join me, and every one here in working together to fulfill Kinship's Mission. ▼



Transforming... Transitioning... Trans...

Matt - is a pseudonym for a member of our Kinship community.

I thought I'd grow up to have a deep bass voice like my father's. I dreamed of singing bass in the church choir. I planned to have a beautiful wife, a few kids, and be a flying missionary doctor somewhere in the far corners of the world. That was not to be. I found myself on a unique journey; one that has taken me down paths I never dreamed of exploring. These have been paths of sorrow, confusion and joy. These have been paths filled with the deepest rivers of emotion. For years in unconscious journey, I lived my life as an innocent child. Suddenly, shockingly I became a person I wasn't. My body began changes to make me into a female when my mind had known all along that I was male. I did not have a name for it. I lacked understanding to formulate my dilemma into words but, I knew that something wasn't right. I was aware enough to know that if anyone learned of this, they would label me as weird. No one was likely to understand or even care to listen.

Time passed. I spoke to no one but God; pouring out my heart, soul, and tears only to Him. I begged to have this taken away. I pled to be made normal. I asked God to let me wake up and be a real guy. I asked God to let me wake up and not mind being a girl. I

asked to make whatever this was go away and have whatever I needed come my way. I grew into adulthood. My journey continued. I read the Bible cover to cover. I became an avid student of any material I could find, I finally found a few people to talk to. I discovered terms for this "it" - transgendered, transsexual. Eventually, I decided that transitioning to male was the right thing for me to do.

Does everyone agree with my decision? No. Do I think I have all the answers? Again, no. I do know I have a lifelong, deep-seated desire to know and follow God's will. What I have to offer is my own experience. I invite you now to put away any preconceived ideas you may have, and walk with me for a moment. Perhaps I can give you a small glimpse into what it is like to be transperson. Maybe someday, somehow, somewhere down the road it will be of help.

Before transitioning, each morning as you wake up and roll over in bed, your own skin touches body parts, attached to you, that don't belong there. Yeah, it's your body, but some parts of it just aren't right. You get up and hop in the shower. You undress quickly, shower with your eyes closed, and avoid seeing yourself naked in the mirror. You dress in such a way as to hide those parts that are wrong. Your posture reflects your self-consciousness. Your heart is pierced every time someone compliments you or every time someone mocks your horrid posture. You don't feel good about it either. Every moment of every day is trapped in the contradiction that you are. You long to just be normal, feel normal, and you want with everything in you to just stand up straight, tall and proud. You

tell yourself that you're just being silly. "If I'm a girl, why can't I just be a girl?" You try really, really hard to be the gender everyone says you're supposed to be; the gender your own body is portraying. No matter what you do, you cannot deny that the greatest gift God gave you-your mind-tells you otherwise. You pray and fast and believe that God can change anything, even your mind. Your own mother tells you that you are sick in the head. You're really not sure what to believe anymore. Does God even exist? Do I exist? Is this all just a bad, bad dream?

After transitioning you wake up in the morning with the sun shining through your window. You stretch, roll over, and open your eyes. You get up, shower, and get ready for work. Somewhere during the day you remember, oh yeah, I'm trans! But those thoughts comprise such a small part of your mind now. You are free to concentrate on living! You can now be authentic, genuine, real. You know that some people think that by changing your body to match your mind, you are now a phony, "twisted" and "bizarre". You still have an ache in your heart-but it's a different one now. It's an ache for those you love deeply who, for whatever reasons, cannot understand your point of view. They cannot understand that you did what you had to do to be the person God made you to be. Of course, you don't want to cause other people pain, especially those that are so close to you. Will they ever understand? Why won't they understand?

I continue to hope, to pray and to love. I had been willing to live my whole life in the wrong gender to avoid

offending my family. But, I am accountable to God, and not to them, for the way I live my life. I have done the hardest thing I could do, and found it to be easy enough, by the grace of God. I am committed to continue my journey toward authenticity for as long as I live. And I will continue to love. Freely. Free. ▼

School of Life...

we didn't have the chance to have good role models. Mum is a best friend to both of us but I think it is important for gay men to have had good male role models also. I feel very lucky. Kinship members have commented that we are blessed to have had these years, to enjoy our lifestyle, to have some family members from both sides love and support us. My life is better because I have this stable relationship and because I have Kinship. I cannot tell you how much of a difference Kinship has made for me, as a person. This group has changed my thinking. Becoming a nurse in the 1980s and working in the operating room has given me insight into human health.

Today, I consider myself a Christian. While I have chosen not to follow much of the dogma I learned in church, it does creep up on me sometimes. I am comforted by the Bible text that God knew me even before I was conceived. I place my trust in the Lord to give me the grace to see me through.

My goals for the future are to help others through Kinship. It is wonderful to let people know that God showers us with unconditional love and acceptance. Heaven wants us to be happy. ▼

Grieving: Moving On

Arlene Taylor PhD - California, USA

(This is the second part of our series in learning to build a life after losses)

Loss hurts. There's no way around that. Our emotions and feelings are closely intertwined with both loss and with the grieving process. Because of this, our grieving style is impacted by the way in which our brain manages and expresses emotions. This, in turn, is influenced by our own innate thinking process preference. The cerebrum or thinking-brain layer is divided by natural fissures into two hemispheres. Additional natural fissures in each hemisphere create four divisions. Each cerebral division possesses somewhat distinct functional abilities, although there is some overlap because the brain is so complex and so interconnected. Each human brain is believed to possess a biochemical energy advantage in one of the four divisions (e.g., PET Scan studies). This means that we tend to expend less energy when performing tasks that draw on the functions of your most efficient division. We tend to expend more energy (e.g., require more oxygen, glucose, micronutrition, rest and sleep) when performing tasks that draw on functions in non-preferred divisions (and that's even after skills have been developed). It also means that unless we make a different conscious choice our brain tends to gravitate toward tasks and behaviors that utilize your most energy-efficient division. This advantage is often referred to as your brain lead and it can impact grief perception,

expression, and recovery processes.

If our bodies have a Left Frontal Lobe Preference we can: be unaware of emotion in self and in others, be oblivious to nonverbal body language, perceive emotion as a potential loss of control, may be more aware of joy than other emotions because it seems that the feeling of joy is processed in this part of the brain, may express emotion through criticism, biting wit, sarcasm, and blowing up, may use a substance (e.g., alcohol) to get in touch with emotions and feelings.

If our brains have a Right Frontal Lobe Preference we may: perceive emotion in the self but not in others, have difficulty reading nonverbal body language, find that we like change so are less threatened by emotions, may be more aware of the protective emotions of anger/fear/sadness because they are processed in this portion of the brain, may express emotion through gestures (e.g., tears, large motor movements, whole body position, prosody, humor, drama, stories)

If our brains have a Left Posterior Lobes Preference we are more likely to: try to avoid emotions, have difficulty reading nonverbal body language, perceive emotions are disruptive to the status quo, maintain and express an emotion we have frequently experienced in our life out of habit,

If our brain has a Right Posterior Lobes Preference we are more likely to: perceive emotion

in the self and in others, be sensitive to emotions in nature, be empathetic and able to read nonverbal body language, often mirror emotions back to others, and have a tendency to express emotion through affective speech, tonality, drama, stories, nonverbals (e.g., touch, body position, small motor gestures).

The emotion of sadness is a signal that we have experienced a loss. Learn to quickly and accurately recognize the emotion of sadness and use the energy it generates to help you take appropriate action and move through grief recovery at a pace that is right for you. In general, appropriately grieving loss episodes in your lives can increase the likelihood that you can truly help others deal and grieve effectively with their losses. Remember that you may circle back and forth or around the stages of grief during the recovery process.

Symptoms of the shock phase may last from a few days to several weeks. They can include: agitation, confusion, collapse, crying, denial or disbelief, euphoria or hysteria, insomnia, lethargy or weakness, loss of appetite, nausea, numbness or a sense of unreality. I would suggest trying some concrete actions. Feel or show your grief: talk it out. Access your support system. Ask for help; allow others to help you. Do not make any major decisions. Rest and survive. Avoid substance abuse. Be around living things; spend time in nature.

Symptoms of the Distress Stage may last from a few weeks to two years. They can include: anger, anguish, anxiety, crying, confusion, fear, guilt, a sense of hopelessness, a sense that life seems to be in limbo, insomnia, restlessness, mood swings, irrational decision-making, poor judgment, loneliness, isolation, low self-esteem, pain, physical

illness, overeating, under eating, improper diet, slowed thinking, and suicidal thoughts. For this stage I suggest that you: allow yourself to mourn, beware of rebounding, seek and accept counseling, acknowledge and verbalize emotional pain, keep decision-making to a minimum, check with others, get a physical examination, avoid substance abuse, accept the support and assistance of others and return to career or volunteer work. Your brain is as unique as your thumbprint so heal at your own pace; try journaling, plan for good nutrition and get plenty of rest and exercise.

The time that we begin to accept our losses varies for each individual. During the Acceptance stage distress becomes less acute with only periodic crashes. We begin to feel stronger and more energetic. Physical symptoms decrease. Nostalgia replaces emotional pain. Loneliness surfaces intermittently. Interests return. We become more comfortable with ourselves. We return to optimum functioning. Some suggestions for action here include: avoid hanging onto the episode of loss. Talk about the person, pet or situation you have lost with others to help keep the memory alive. Exercise consistently and pamper yourself regularly. Let go of what-ifs and might-have-beens. Forgive yourself and others. Socialize. Be open to including new people. Develop new interests

Take control of your own life. Learn to act rather than react.

Studies show that males often move to anger when the emotions of fear or sadness arise (whether or not anger is the appropriate emotion for the situation). Females, on the other hand, often move directly to sadness when the emotions of anger or fear arise. Not only can

this be unhelpful to the individual who is misidentifying the emotion, it can be a source of conflict and misunderstanding, especially at a time when supportive cross-gender communication is vitally important.

Males and females typically exhibit widely differing coping strategies and styles of behaviors in situations related to loss and grief. Because of societal expectations that males should remain in control of their emotions at all times (essentially be silent about them), males may fail to articulate their loss. The unexpressed pain can trigger an emotional retreat into stony silence, attempts at suicide, or violent reactionary behaviors. Unresolved grief from the past can increase the intensity of their reactions to present episodes of loss. They may react out of proportion to the situation at hand because of their accumulated slush fund of stored, unresolved emotional pain.

Females, on the other hand, have been socialized to express grief aloud and encounter fewer taboos against crying. They may avoid taking constructive action, believing that talking is enough even when taking action could help them to cope more effectively. They can become stuck in recounting the loss, and develop the habit of brooding. This enmeshment can delay acceptance and resolution and lead to immobility.

From my research it will be helpful for women to learn to take constructive action whether or not they feel like it at the moment and to avoid perpetually indulging negative feelings and brooding endlessly over the incident. It would be helpful for men to: learn to communicate verbally, articulate grief, act out feelings in an appropriate manner, engage in

effective grief recovery and to realize that emotional pain is not likely to resolve on its own.

Loss can be overwhelming for children. They may go from being quiet to noisy (or vice versa), or from caring to aggressive or stoic. They may experience nightmares or sleep-walking, become easily upset, become frantic when care providers are out of sight, or revert to more infantile behaviors (e.g., thumb sucking, bed wetting). They may begin to engage in risky behaviors, begin to isolate from others, or become excessively clingy. To the extent that you are comfortable with handling loss and managing your own grief recovery you will be able to role model an appropriate process for them.

Here are some suggestions for actions you can take to help children deal with loss effectively: Provide opportunities for them to talk about how they feel. Accept that what they feel is reality for them at this time. Listen without judgment and be patient. It can sometimes be helpful to offer feedback later on rather than immediately after they have verbalized their feelings. Encourage children to express their feelings by drawing, taking pictures, journaling, or working on crafts. Role model using words that express emotions-words such as afraid, sad, or angry. Also use words that express happiness and pleasure at memory. Avoid denial, mislabeling, and minimizing. Loss and grief can be cumulative having known the person or pet (if death was involved). Let children know that tears are okay and can be helpful in the grieving process, regardless of gender. If children are able to exhibit tears, reaffirm that tears are a natural brain phenomenon that are a gesture of deep emotion. Reassure them that you expect to be there to

take care of them. Remind them of other people in their lives that also expect to be there to help them grow up safely (e.g., aunts, uncles, good friends, teachers). Give them hope for the future. Write on the calendar activities for next week, month, and year. The upcoming "carrot" can help them see past the immediate loss and enable them to visualize the future. Maintain familiar routines as much as possible to help promote a sense of security and stability. Knowing what is going to happen (e.g., dinner is at 6pm, grocery shopping happens Wednesday evening) can reduce a tendency to carry a sense of uncertainty into every aspect of life. Help them to experience a sense of being in control over something (e.g., clothing selections, foods, games). If it is inappropriate for them to be in complete control, at least give them some choice about a portion of the event, activity, or situation.

Avoid isolating yourself. Schedule time with friends and relatives. Reminisce about the happy and the sad. If the loss involves a person or pet, tell stories about them. Laugh about funny things that happened with them in the past. If tears come even while you are laughing, accept that. Both joy and loss are part of living. Allow them to participate in doing something to improve the situation for others (e.g., visiting a friend, taking flowers to the hospital, writing a letter, making phone calls, donating food to homeless). Include children in your grief recovery process. Be authentic. Allow them to see frailty as well as strength. Children often have a sense about what is "real" and what isn't. Avoid frightening them with your grief. At the same time, include them as you move through the process.

Strategies for Recovering from Your Losses

1. Create a loss history

Write down all the losses you can recall. Include them all, even small ones (so called). Put in the dates and locations to the best of your!

2. Verbalize your loss

Use real words and avoid euphemisms. Actively engage in grief recovery. All human beings experience loss in life and they can recovery from those losses. Allow yourself to experience all your emotions-they give you valuable information-knowing that you don't have to take overt action on any of them.

3. Stop blaming

This includes yourself as well as others. Most people did the best they could at the time with the tools they had. Even if they were evil, you can't change what happened. Giving up the need to blame and just dealing with "what is" allows you to be more open to the trauma that others may be experiencing. It can give you the opportunity to pass along what you have learned to someone else.

4. Take responsibility for your own grief recovery

Living the way you know that your loved one would want you to live requires a recovery process. This doesn't mean you have to go it alone. It does mean no one can do it for you. Your recovery is your job. Accept that death and loss are as much a part of life as birth and the process of acquiring. Be very clear that while others may be both supportive and affirming, they cannot work the process for you. Successful and even graceful grief recovery is one way to honor your loved one.

5. Access your support system

Human beings are relational and spiritual creatures. Hopefully, you've already developed relationships with a few key people who can listen to you talk, provide helpful feedback, engage in selected activities with you, or just "be" with you as needed. Avoid isolating yourself. Allow others to give you the gift of their empathy and caring, which can help them in their grief recovery as well. Hone your spirituality in a way that works for you.

6. Celebrate the resilience of the human spirit

Respect the memory of those who have died. Each one holds a position in your generational inheritance or in your life journey. You carry that memory in your mind and can call it up any time you choose. That is one way to keep a loved one with you. Talking about your loved one and sharing special stories is another way. You may want to do something special to help keep the memory of your loved one alive on this planet.

7. Look for the open door

Recognize that you always get something when you have to give something up. Look for that gift. Find that something! When one door closes in life, avoid wasting time pounding on it. Instead, look for other options. Be alert to unexpected opportunities and take constructive action to embrace them. Something very wonderful may happen in this process! Above all, honor your own work in the face of loss, whatever that loss may be-and it does involve work! ▼

I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship.
-Louisa May Alcott

Kinship News

IMRU? - Naveen Jonathan

This New Year 2007, the IMRU? leadership team is looking for more ways in which we can foster and build community within our forum as well with our larger parent group, Kinship International. The members of the Leadership Team have been speaking with various members of IMRU? and asking for suggestions on how we can do this. We are also searching for ways in which we can dialogue with one another. We are implementing a "Subject/Discussion of the Week" thread. Each Sunday the members of the Leadership Team will post a question for the other members to react to, answer and discuss. In regards to building more bridges with Kinship International, we are asking all of you that are regional coordinators as well as hold other positions of leadership within Kinship, to please make sure that you include as many IMRU? members in your activities and plans. The members of the leadership team will be passing on all announcements of Kinship gatherings and activities that will be happening in various regions and within the organization as a whole. These are just two initial things we are going to implement for this year. Watch in future issues as we share more plans to make the IMRU? forum one that is active and vibrant in 2007. For more information about IMRU? please contact us at IMRUGroup@gmail.com.

Someone To Talk To - Carol Grady

New Year's weekend I attended the Spiritual Renaissance Retreat in Monterey, CA. For thirteen years they have

been organized by John Hughson, a pastor at Pacific Union College. One hundred fifty, open minded, liberal people attended with me. I offered two sessions of "SDA Families Dealing with Homosexuality: How the Church Can Help". Each one had about thirty people. Most of them had gay kids or other relatives. Almost all of them were very supportive. One retired doctor from PUC said he has a gay nephew. The doctor described himself as friendly and accepting while talking all about the pathology he had seen resulting from gay sex. He insisted that it caused physical harm.

Thankfully, a nurse sitting across from him reminded him that what he saw was no doubt the result of promiscuity, and that a committed relationship protects partners from that. She is a hospice nurse who has held hundreds of gay men in her arms as they were dying of AIDS. Every one of them told her this was not something they had chosen. I mentioned that with the greater promiscuity we see among heterosexuals today, there is also a great increase in STDs in that population. There was a youth pastor from southern California who was really sharp and defended gay marriage. A friend I haven't seen since college days said she thinks her son is gay and wanted to know how she could encourage him to come out so they could talk about it. She thinks her husband, who died, was probably gay. John and Carolyn Wilt, who are parents of a gay son and on my fflag list, took me home with them and I flew back from Sacramento. On the way we listened to a CD of a musical play they had attended, written by a gay man. It was the story of a young gay man whose father had left them when he

was quite young. He didn't get along well with his mother because, as it turned out, they were both hiding something from each other - he that he was gay and she that she was getting married again. When they both let their news slip (came out of the closet) their tensions disappeared and they were reconciled. It was really good. The name of the play is "Convenience".

Kinship Australia - Noel Thorpe

I will be going over to New Zealand in February, to talk to our group there.

We want to place adverts in their local Gay papers and on the internet. We will attend the GLBTIQ Pride Fair Days in Sydney and in Brisbane.

We'd like to welcome Kinship's PR Coordinator, Scott Tetley, back home to Perth. He is already back in graduate school working to complete his Master's Degree in Business Administration. Any of you who would like to support the work done in Australia can request that some of their Kinship donations be earmarked for this area.

www.sdakinshipaustralia.org ▼



Mark Your Kinship Calendars!!

March 9 and 10: SDA Kinship International Board Meeting, Glendale City Church, California. You are welcome to attend, contribute your ideas and enjoy the vision building!

April 20-22: US Region 2 and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware will be the hosts of our annual Spring Mini Kampmeeting. On Friday evening we will have a soup and cornbread supper at the beach house followed by a brief devotional and prayer to usher in the Sabbath. There will be plenty of time to fellowship together; meeting new folks and catching up with old friends. The Sabbath schedule will include Sabbath school, church and free time after lunch. There will be an evening program with dinner out at a local restaurant afterwards. This is just a "teaser" of good things to come, so mark your calendars and plan to be there! The registration form and a more detailed schedule will be available soon.

For more information, you can contact Yolanda at yselliott@aol.com

July 20-22: Women's Weekend arrives at the Sheraton in San Francisco! We have planned a Sabbath cruise of the San Francisco Bay, great meals and invigorating discussions. For more information and to register you can contact Yolanda at yselliott@aol.com.

July 22-29: SDA Kinship International Annual Kampmeeting!

This year we are offering special rates to make this adventure more affordable to families. The only rate for children will be age based meal

costs. For more information you are invited to contact Karen at karenbwetherell@cs.com.

September 7-10 - European Kinship Meeting 6 will be held in a beautiful conference center just outside of Paris. You can see more of the centre by logging onto http://www.cpcvidf.asso.fr/page/welcome_cpcvidf.html. On Sunday there will be a group tour of the City of Lights. In keeping with our European Kinship tradition, we are locating and reserving a villa in Brittany for those of you who might want to join in a holiday for the rest of the week.

September 28-October 1: We have an impressive lineup of people to speak at our second Australian Kampmeeting. We're planning an excursion of Sydney Harbor on Sunday.

November 2-4: The Vermont Mini Kampmeeting still has seven rooms that have not been reserved at the Inn. We've begun to plan our surprises and our workshops. You are always welcome to call Catherine for more information: Katgurian@aol.com. ▼



Living Joy

Reino Kulkonen - Ostra Tunhem, Sweden

I was raised a Seventh Day Adventist in Finland. It was so long ago. I may have forgotten any negative things about my upbringing. I went to a Seventh Day Adventist School. At twelve or thirteen I began to realize I was different. I knew that, in some way, I was attracted to the same sex. It was not in any way concrete. It was just a feeling but, I became more and more conscious of that feeling. For me it caused quite a lot of talking with my God; What do you want? In some way I was already bothered by the future. I wondered how life would be. Sometimes I thought that maybe I could work in the church. As I became older I understood that it would be impossible if I was attracted to men. During the fifties and the sixties I didn't know how I would manage everyday life, even in the Scandinavian society. Homosexuality was not something we could speak about. I did not want to live a lie. At first I thought I must. That was not something I wanted. In school, I didn't talk about this issue to anyone. No one knew and no one teased. I had many good friends who are still my friends. They live in Finland. I meet them sometimes. We have had academy reunions. There I am totally open and tell my life. We go around and talk about our lives and I am totally open and tell. It is really nice to meet these people. They are my friends.

I accepted myself as a gay person when I was fifteen. It was a religious experience for me. It was a deal with my God. I left the whole issue with Him. That



has been very profound for me in my experience. In some way I was totally convinced that this is how God wanted me. I believed then and I believe now that He had the responsibility to take care of me if He made me this way. From that moment I have never thought I was somewhat inferior to other people.

I didn't speak to anyone about my orientation when I went to school. At the time I was a teenager no one talked about this issue. I did not go to an Adventist University. When I was studying at the University at Turku we had a large Adventist youth group. We were very active. I knew I was gay but I was very involved with our church programs and I had never met any other person that I knew was gay. Eventually I came to understand that a teacher leading out in some of the courses was gay. He was the first person I had ever talked to about the issue of homosexuality. My eyes were opened. I understood that I was not alone and there were lots of people like me around me. This university

teacher introduced me to other gay people. He had grown up in this city and he knew lots of other persons. I got to know some of them but I did not date any of them. I have not had any contact with them since then I finished my studies and moved to Stockholm. In those years there were lots of young people, including Adventists, who moved to Sweden. A group of us started the Finnish congregation in Sweden. First we just had a Sabbath School Class. Later we began to have worship services. Now the Finnish group is its own Adventist congregation. My first years in Stockholm I was very active in the church as a Sabbath School Teacher. I liked that work very much.

I almost fell in love with someone I met but I quickly understood that this was not a relationship that I wanted. I tried to find people to date or with whom I could be involved. Sometimes I had strong feelings for them but there wasn't anything to convince me that there should be something other than strong feelings.

Through some gay persons I knew in Stockholm, I met Ingemar. I didn't speak to him at first. Then I went to a Sara Leander concert; one of those that she gave every year saying "this is my last concert", and I saw Ingemar again. We started to speak more. I had gotten to know quite a lot of persons but I knew "this is something" when I met him. I understood that this was "Oh Wow!" Our first date was on a Thursday. On Friday he came here to Ostra Tunhem without me. I knew this was his

country place. When he came back on Sunday he called me. We met on Monday. We slept together and all the rules collapsed. I was really surprised. I had never planned it to be like that! All the rules collapsed! I thought I would meet someone with some friends and then we would meet several times and get to know each other very thoroughly and then after five years maybe we would be serious. All my well thought out rules just collapsed. This was in October 1973. We got a new flat together in March of 1974. He was the first and only person I ever dated seriously. There never has been a danger for our relationship. They just do not happen of course. We have to be conscious of how we work for our life together.

Even before I met Ingemar I met persons who lived together. I knew this part of life was possible. They were examples. I told you about the couple who had met each other as students. One was going to be a priest. When they fell in love he knew he could not be a priest and he changed his occupation. I was good friends with them.

By 1974 it was not any more considered as a sickness. The Swedish Parliament gave a ruling that the love between persons of the same sex is equal to the love of persons from opposite sex. There was quite a strong gay movement working for this equality. Of course there was much to be done. All of this inspired me very much. In 1976 or 1978 I was one of three who started a gay Christian organization. I was actively working for gay rights. The church thought it was wrong for me to work like that. I had been very active in my congregation. Then I began to work in the Christian gay organization. There was a tremendous response from people in

Sweden. When we had our first meeting in the Cathedral of Stockholm it was packed; there were around fifteen hundred people. I was one of the organizers. There were some gay Adventists who attended but they were deep in the closet. They did not dare to come out. These Adventists chose to live a lie and keep good contact with the church.

It did become a problem with Seventh Day Adventists for me and Ingemar to speak about our lives. One of the church leaders told us "the church is not ready for this. If you had been silent it would have been okay". He did not say anything about God just that it would have been okay if we had been silent. But, I had this deal with me and my God. I was and am still convinced that God would not have made me like this if He did not want me like this. The pastor of my Finnish congregation proposed change therapy. I said "No, thank you." I had taken some studies at the University of Stockholm in Psychology and had studied aversion therapies. I understood that these change therapies are aversion therapies and they are not good for you. It is not good to have anyone make you something else other than what you are.

I think the Swedish gay movement has been healthy. They have done very good work. I have followed their work keenly but could not be part of every group because I was more focused in this gay Christian organization. I know many people from there but I only go to their meetings once every two years. I think it is thanks to these gay organizations that Swedish opinion has been totally changed. The society is on our side. Even the Swedish church is on our side. The leaders of many of the other organizations are on our side. All the Swedish

bishops voted for this blessing of the partnership to be held in the Swedish church so that partners get exactly the same rites as married couples.

My relationship with the Adventist church shifted when they understood that I lived with a man. No one wanted to discuss the matter with me. No one was listening. I think they were afraid. Even the gay persons who were members of the Finnish congregation did not discuss my relationship with Ingemar with me. The young gay Swedish Adventist pastor did not dare to discuss the matter with me. When he met a guy and fell in love he left the church. Now he pastors a Lutheran church in Skona. My Adventist school friends from Finland have wanted to listen and they have come to visit me and Ingemar in Stockholm. Some of them have visited several times here in Tunham.

I have waited. I have not taken an initiative. They kicked me out of the church. Ingemar and I moved in together in 1973 and 1974 and we did not keep it a secret. This pastor who proposed the change therapy moved back to Finland. Next there was a woman pastor who became a good friend for me for many years. The church's reaction to my relationship with Ingemar was difficult for her. She was very distressed when the church board struck my name from the books. We had an open meeting after Sabbath School where we discussed this matter. The church board proposed that Ingemar and I separate. That was laughable. I got to hear all those texts from the Bible. I knew the texts already. I had read a book by McNeal on The Bible and Homosexuality. He went through all those texts very carefully. He not only reputed the clobber texts, he talked about the gifts gay people bring

to humanity.

I lost my optimism for the Seventh Day Adventist church. No one even listened to me. No one said they wanted to hear my thoughts and study; even though there must have been some people who would like to have listened to me.

I didn't lose my God. That was the most important thing. I could see the human frailty in these things we call churches. When I visit the biggest Adventist church in Stockholm there are people who recognize me and come to speak to me but, nothing more. Maybe this has caused some kind of shift in my thinking about the church. Maybe it began even before the troubles with the church. I understood that no church is perfect. It is made up of living human persons who are not perfect. In this way I can forgive the church. I do not need to hate. They are human beings like me.

I do have some difficult questions. Why can't these persons act humanely to each other? Why can't they forgive and accept us all as Christians should do? Our God is loving, accepting and invites us to the feast. The big question for me in my relationship to the Seventh Day Adventist church is "why do you have these rules about how we must be certain ways that you have determined and then you are welcome."?

I was really glad to understand that there was a gay Adventist organization. After the introduction of computers it became much easier to get find Kinship. Kinship was good because there I met Adventists who listened. I have had contact with Ecumenical Groups for Persons who are Homosexual. In Scandinavia we use the word homosexual for both gay and lesbian people. Now we have so many letters (GLBTI) that I think

it is good that we do not forget the others and take care of all kinds of persons.

I believe that even though it has not been easy, I can love the church because I recognize that I am human and the church is also human and makes mistakes. As a gay Adventist, we have an opportunity to consider what is there in Adventism that is worthwhile to keep. We can decide what it is that makes us Seventh Day Adventists. I believe that every thinking person must address these issues. I think the gospel is preached in many different denominations but I grew up in the Adventist church and I find the gospel more easily there than in other churches.

Other parts of our lives as a couple were relatively easy. In Stockholm Ingemar and I were open in our workplaces. All my colleagues knew about our relationship. I have not seen any negativity towards us. I think Ingemar may have been more scared about his parents, the people around here, and his co-workers than I was but I believe that opinions in Sweden have changed and we have nothing to fear. We can lead normal lives. Our gayness is nothing. It does not need to separate ourselves from our neighbors. We do not need to live in a gay ghetto. In a big



city sometimes it is easy to become isolated and meet only gay persons. In city life we are freer to choose people with whom we will be in contact. Even in Sweden it might be possible for gay people to isolate themselves from those who are not gay. In rural areas, like where we live, that is just not possible. We have both straight and gay friends and colleagues here.

I told my Seventh Day Adventist parents about our relationship soon after I met Ingemar. That first visit I went alone to Finland. Ingemar had given me a book about being "in the closet" about our Christian beliefs. There are still lots of persons who are scared to confess that they are Christians. I sat on the boat to Finland and read this book. I become more and more convinced that there was no reason to hide my belief and my gayness from my family. I was already thirty when Ingemar and I met. I knew they had been thinking "why hasn't my son married?" That was a good way to begin the conversation. When I got to Finland I announced that I had something quite exciting to tell them. "I am finally in love!! I have been waiting to meet the right person. He just happens to be a man. You do not need to think I am unhappy."

Of course, at first it was not so easy for them. I had told my sister earlier. She had no problems. In the beginning it was difficult for my parents so speak about my new found love. Thirty three years ago there were very few places where they could read about the issue. I think it is very important that we give something to our parents that they can read. I think churches should give much more support to parents who have gay children. Eventually my parents accepted our relationship. I think

their acceptance came because of my attitude. I felt so good as a gay person that they must have come to believe that this is not a bad or dangerous thing. When my parents call me, they say, "tell hello to Ingemar". We have relatives in the very small congregation in Finland where my parents are members. They know that I am gay. Often they ask me to lead in Sabbath School. Now, every time I go to Finland I have to make sure that I prepare to lead the Sabbath School lesson.

I am of course glad when I hear the gospel preached in any church. But when I hear it preached in Adventist churches I am even more delighted. Sometimes I think the best gospel comes when the person who preaches knows me as a gay person and gives this gospel even to me. That way I am included. That is why I made the theme of our 2006 European Kinship Meeting the "Inclusive Church". This is a very important theme to contemplate. ▼

connection ▼

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And
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vision, skill building, arts and crafts, and music.

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