

connection

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Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

—Rainer Maria Rilke in *Letters to a Young Poet*

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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.)

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One Step At A Time

Mike Lewis - Scotland

Once upon a time I referred to myself as a Seventh-day Adventist. Now I call myself a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Sometimes I tell people that I am a Christian despite being an Adventist. This usually raises a wry smile and knowing looks.

The only child of devoted parents, I was brought up "in the Church". My Father was a Pastor, and my Mother an unpaid Church worker who supported him all through the years of his ministry. When he died, somewhat prematurely, she continued to work tirelessly for the church she loved. My Father's dream was for me to go into ministry, and though he never said so, he must have been disappointed when I did not follow his footsteps. My leaning was science, not arts. I knew I would never succeed in the serious study of theology, Greek and church history. I knew the church would never employ me as a gay man. Why waste time preparing for a career that would never happen?

Over the years my interest in theology-or rather-my interest in The Things of God-has grown. I believe that I am now starting to fulfill a calling that has taken me many years to recognize. I firmly believe that the future holds tremendous opportunities to be part of God's work in whatever area ministry He chooses to call me.

Last Sabbath the preacher spoke about the selection of Matthias, the Apostle who was recruited to fill the empty space left vacant following the desertion and suicide of Judas Iscariot. His challenge was for his listeners to fill the Empty Space in His work that God calls them to fill. I believe that God has brought me to this time and place, one step at a time, to minister, in whatever way He empowers me, to those of the LGBTI community within or currently marginalized and rejected by the Church. There are many.

My childhood was as happy and as sad as any other's. At age nine I had a schoolboy crush on my young, good-looking teacher, Mr. Christopher



Muspratt. I was fascinated by his very hairy legs, and impatiently looked forward to football once a week (loathed the game but loved the view). I somehow knew that none of the other kids had this fascination (which I still have to this day). I never thought of it as 'wrong' or 'un-natural'. For me it was 'normal'. I didn't question my attractions. I was a shy child. I think this is partly because I was brought up 'different' "Remember, you're an Adventist", my Mother would always tell me. And in those days to be an Adventist was nothing short of Weird. Kids were veggie. We

never went to Saturday morning flicks (children's cinema). We weren't allowed to play a cigarette packet game of the 1950's called fag-cards. We didn't read comics. There was no sex education for six-year-olds. In fact I never heard my Father or Mother use the word 'sex'. Kinsey had only just reported, Danny La Rue hadn't stepped out. GLF, CHE and Pride were still years into the future. Unlike many Preachers' Kids, I went through the Sabbath School tiers as a model child. I arrived in adolescence around the middle of the Swinging Sixties like a 'naked, newborn babe, facing the blast'.

My Father was called to pastor a new set of Churches when I was 13 and I transferred to a new school. The other kids had covered human biology during the previous year. I missed out on the 'facts of life' and the 'birds and bees'. Despite this lack of education I had, of course, a growing awareness of what was between my legs. With that came a growing interest in what was between other boy's and men's legs. What was between girl's legs I never even thought of, let alone had any interest in. When the other boys were concealing *Playboy*, with all its body parts, behind *A Shorter Latin Primer*, I tried to content myself with the belief that *I am an Adventist. I am different*. I agonized over this difference for years. I didn't even know *what different*

meant. I knew I couldn't talk about this 'difference' to anyone else because no-one else in the world could possibly be like I was, and no-one else in the world could possibly understand .

I attended Church as a good PK. I got used to doing things from the front. I enjoyed studying Sabbath School lessons. The thought of praying in public terrified me. I dutifully played my part as a Missionary Volunteer, Sabbath School Secretary, Youth Assistant, and occasional organist, when various nominating committees felt moved to appoint me. I loved helping my Father 'do stuff' for Church, and always felt part of the wider Church Family. The big evangelistic campaigns of the 1960s thrilled me; but I lived within a POLYCHOTOMY. I wanted to be part of this Big Church Movement. But, it was Weird and I was Different. The three appeared to be irreconcilable. I learned to be a chameleon; turning off the secular at

Friday sunset and turning it back on again on Monday morning. I was proud of Church from Friday evening to Sunday evening. I denied its existence from Monday to Friday. I thought of sex continuously during the week. I tried to suppress it (usually successfully) at weekends. Then I left home.

In 1969 it was a big step to take. My parents were against the idea but reluctantly let me go. Almost no Good Adventist young man went to university in Britain during those days. Doing so meant we would get ensnared by the world and be lost forever. Good Adventist young men went to Newbold College to train for the Ministry. I knew I could never go to Newbold. The men's dormitories smelled disgusting. Attending Newbold meant sharing a study/bedroom with someone who probably prayed six times day and studied his Bible each morning and evening. It meant being in proximity to someone whose father was a Pillar of the Church. It meant having to deal with someone who would never let me see what was between his legs. Even if he did, I would be terrified by the possibility that I might do Something Really Wicked. So I went to Kingston Technical. As predicted, I left the Church. Though the world "ensnared me" to a certain extent, my departure from the faith was more because the Church offered me nothing that I needed and gave me everything I didn't.

The Youth Pastor at that time looked 'poofy' and 'saintly'. I didn't want anything to do with that sort of person. He did take time to visit me and made me welcome in his home on Friday evenings, where they prayed and studied (a bit) and talked about girls (a lot). I craved the companionship and understanding of other young men with whom I

could talk about my metamorphosis from an ignorant teenager to a gay man. I wasn't interested in talking about and dating girls like all the others of my peer group. I wasn't interested in football and female pop stars and the student's union bar and all night pajama parties. The college had a Gay society, but I never saw anyone openly associated with it. 'Glad To Be Gay' had not yet arrived. 'It's the Real Thing' referred to Coca Cola, not Gay Love, and London Pride was either a garden saxifrage or a beer brewed by Youngs, not the biggest peaceful march in the capital.

I love the Great Outdoors. I am passionate about mountain walking; always have been and probably always will be. When I was 21 I took a holiday in the Lake District and by chance met a man on the top of a mountain. Ten minutes earlier or later our paths would probably never have crossed. My life would have been utterly different. We became friends. We

became sexual partners. I slept around in my twenties and thirties; not as much as some, but quite a lot. I'm not proud of it. I can't honestly say I'm ashamed either. To me, now, it's just part of "before". He said he loved me but I never loved him. I just needed sex. Lots of it. We had wonderful sex. Lots of it. D.C.W., please forgive me.

A.C.B came along and fell in love with me. Again, we were very good friends and enjoyed our times together, both in and out of bed. But I didn't know how to handle being in love. When a mutual friend asked if we had been sleeping together and mildly disapproved of the answer I gave him, it all ended in tears.

D.A.G was my first love. Tall, dark and (reasonably) handsome we spent long hours talking about the Important Things in Life. I fell passionately in love with him, hoping against hope that he would turn out not to be straight. One Sabbath morning he was going to see one of our friends off from Heathrow. I just had to be there with him. Church or a bar at Heathrow? It was the first time I had deliberately missed Church. The guilt weighed a megaton. It was the first step on the slippery slope. He told me he was straight soon after. I was devastated. We keep in touch, and remain friends. After twenty years, the pain of his rejection still stung bitterly. Now, after thirty years, I can cope. Time is a great healer.

I left the Church. I still believed that God existed, at least theoretically. I simply didn't want anything to do with Him. He had made me gay, caused me all these problems, made my life hell. Why should I have anything to do with Him? There was too much guilt dished out by Church; too little comfort, instruction and assurance given by the Church.

D.A.G. was my first love.

There were too many young men to sleep with, too many mountains to climb, too many little old ladies in the Church and certainly no room for anyone who was gay. A church member who was a dear, trusted friend from childhood invited me to lunch one Sabbath. The subject of gays came up in the conversation as she carved a chicken. She announced in her usual brusque way "We don't want poofs in the Church". I was utterly devastated. A spear had pierced my heart. A hole in the floor transporting me to the other side of the universe would not have been deep enough to bury me. Even as I write this tears come to my eyes. With great difficulty I write: "Elsie, I forgive you; you didn't know what you were saying". I fell into a deep, deep hole; sex, alcohol and shopping on Sabbath (which gave me the greater guilt). It took ten years to fall though to the other side of the universe. There, beyond the Dark Side of the Moon, I fell into the arms of a loving God.

Beaconsfield is a pleasant town in the Chilterns about 40 minutes from London. My career in scientific instrumentation had taken me there, and I liked the area very much. I spent as many weekends hiking in the mountains as I could afford. During a group climb, one of the blokes announced, out of the blue, that he would not be joining us again. He has decided to become a Muslim. This shocked me; an event that does not happen easily or often. "Why?" I asked. His reasons included "standing up for one's principles". I remember thinking: "The principles I used to have I ditched long ago. Now I have no principles to stand up for." That realization, and that fact that my alcohol consumption five nights a week in the local gay bar had left me broke in many senses of the word, began to shift the direction of my life.

In 1982 all the churches in the Beaconsfield got together and evangelized the area with a "Sharing Faith" campaign. There were posters on every lamp post. For two weeks I tried to ignore them. I walked past them looking in other directions. I crossed to the other side of the street. I took alternative routes. I could not escape the posters. I figured God was trying to talk to me. The Sharing Faith week had been organized by the evangelicals of the town. I phoned the organizer and was assigned to a house group down the road. There I met a lovely group of sincere and friendly Christians. I went to most of the special services that had been arranged in the Catholic, Baptist and Anglican Churches. I was surprised to see them mostly full. People were taking their faith seriously. I had been under the misapprehension that only Adventists did that! I heard other people's stories and told a part of my own. A. C. made me especially welcome. She mothered me, prayed for me and encouraged me. I

started attending an occasional Sunday morning service at the Baptist Church. They were good to hear and good for me but my Adventist beliefs did not fit there. I knew the Sabbath was important and that the Baptists could probably never offer me that haven. I decided to revisit an SDA Church. At the time it was a big step to take. It proved to be a small one compared to others which would follow.

I was welcomed with open arms by people I had known in my childhood days. I began to re-establish my spiritual roots. My commitment strengthened and my involvement in Church activities increased. After a period of being seriously broke I discovered that the principle of tithing really did work. My finances got sorted out. Giving up those five days a week in a pub probably helped too! I got involved with Sabbath School lessons, facilitated music, led out in services, organized ingathering and became part of the structure of the local Adventist congregation. Over the next 15 or so years I got more involved; and more frustrated. As far as I could tell, no one knew I was gay. The subject never came up. Occasionally I would be asked if I was married or when I was going to get married. I had learned a long time before to fend off these intrusions with excuses and a change of subject. (Too independent, too busy traveling....)

House groups were a good part of church life; I firmly believe they are one of the most valuable assets of modern spirituality. But I still could not be myself - a middle-aged, single, gay man struggling to come to terms with sexuality and Christianity. In my mind, to be gay and Christian was still an oxymoron. To the rest of the group I was my parent's son, a Pastor's Kid, a respected member, someone who was perhaps a little strange. I was self-employed, traveled a lot, was interested in bird-watching, botany, mountaineering, cooking, music, reading, gardening. And, had my elderly Mother living with me. I didn't fit within the traditional Adventist picture of 'family': mum, dad, two good kids, Volvo, Labrador etc. When 'family matters' came up for discussion I always felt alienated: couldn't be true to myself, wasn't free to speak openly, afraid to reveal who I really was. Occasionally some preachers spoke anti-gay messages. This always hurt and embarrassed me. I never had the courage to take my stand against such attacks. I desperately needed reassurance and affirmation, not condemnation and alienation.

In January 2001, I decided that something had to change. I couldn't spend the rest of my life as the only lonely gay Christian in the world. I had pretty well severed all connections with most of my gay friends when I began attending Church again. I knew I had to meet others. I had seen an occasional advertisement for Metropolitan Community Church

(MCC). The only thing I knew about them was that they were an openly gay and Christian organization. That had to be my starting point. In a moment of bravery I did a search for MCC. I found their meeting place in the United Reform Church building in Camden Town. I turned up for Sunday evening service. I had barely walked through the door when A.W. leapt up to greet me, introduced himself, made me welcome and told me about the service that was shortly to start. Over the years I have attended numerous Churches and was quite used to different styles of worship and varied service content. The order of service was familiar: hymns, readings, prayers, a sermon and communion. What was totally unfamiliar was the inclusiveness of the services. Gay, lesbian, and transgendered people were all specifically referred to as God's beloved children. We were affirmed and welcomed. I had never heard this before, it thrilled me, and it changed my life.

The people I grew to know and love during my time at MCC North London will never understand how grateful I am to them for their love, their support and for the way they led me to a new understanding of the workings of God in humanity. During the next three years I hardly missed a Sunday evening service. I got used to worshipping with this unusual group of God's children. I became good friends with some of the congregation. I almost always left MCC on a Sunday evening with a song in my heart; something that rarely happened on a Sabbath morning. Anyway it was a different song. The words were different, the spirituality was different, the coming-close-to God experience was different. And it was wonderful. I learned the song "My Jesus, my Saviour" and suddenly it was the song of my heart experience. Thank you, Stephen, for letting God sing that to me through your voice.

On one occasion the pastor asked for volunteers to form a Worship Team. I got involved with service planning and participation. We discussed liturgy, beliefs, inclusive language and music in worship. We introduced multimedia and worked on PowerPoint presentations. A band started leading the music for the worship service. It was fabulous. During those heady years I saw new revelations of how God calls and embraces those whom conventional Churches have kicked in the teeth and thrown out of their doors.

I still had difficulties but my life was improving. I started learning how to answer those who would throw the clobber texts at me. I became more acquainted with alternative hermeneutics. I started learning to accept people who were very different

from me in appearance, life-style and belief system. Most important, I started learning to see God in a totally new light. In that light I wondered how do I, as a gay man, find the way to most fully and meaningfully love Jesus, who is portrayed in scripture as single, celibate, heterosexual. A movie released in 2005 would help me on that part of my journey.

During the year 2000, the BBC ran a series of reality TV programs portraying the lives of forty individuals and families who had volunteered to be placed on a remote, uninhabited Scottish Island for twelve months. The program focused on their inter-relationships, their struggles and their successes in living as community in a primitive environment. They had no access to modern conveniences, except for the film crew recording every waking move. I love the Western Isles and have holidayed on many of them over the years. The idea of settling and surviving in a remote area also fascinated me. I enjoyed the series. Within it there was a special interest.

Along with a black Adventist couple who volunteered to take part in the experiment, there was also an out, rather in-your-face gay guy. The scenery was magnificent and the social interaction was interesting to watch from the comfort of the armchair. At one stage there was a viscous verbal attack on the gay man by the West Indian Adventist wife. Both persons' behavior was unacceptable but the observer can never understand the real causes. I felt ashamed that an Adventist could be so bigoted and that a gay man could be so intolerant and provocative. The gay man and the West Indian couple resigned from the experiment before the year was up. As they left the husband was interviewed. He largely regretted having given up the year to take part in the experience. The one thing that stuck vividly in my mind was his statement that "if, during this year, I could have brought even one of these lost souls to Christ, then all the pain and suffering would have been worthwhile". I remember thinking as he spoke those words: 'I have never, ever, brought anyone to Christ'. I felt utterly ashamed. But, I reasoned, how could I, as a gay man, bring another gay man into a church that condemned homosexual practices and was totally intolerant of openly gay people? It just couldn't work. Or so I thought.

At this time I was about to complete my cross-England walk with two of my long term best friends. Both of them had rejected any form of Christian belief. We set out from Moreton-in-Marsh in the spring of 1994 to walk the length of England.

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We walked about a week at a time; sometimes heading north, sometimes south. Our southern destination was The Lizard. The northern end was to be Marshall Meadows, near Berwick-upon-Tweed, where the English/Scottish border meets the North Sea. We shared many interesting conversations; some of them religious. I often prayed during those eight years that I would be able to sow seed that would germinate in their hearts. In actuality I did nothing proactive to initiate anything. Roy, one of my walking companions, always seemed to appreciate a visit to a country Church where he would sit and meditate briefly while Peter and I looked at the architecture. On one occasion we discussed different translations of the Bible. I was surprised when he told me had bought one. I told Roy that I had become part of the Metropolitan Community Church congregation. He said that he could never attend a church that condemned gay people. As I explained about MCC Roy surprised me by asking if he could come to a service with me. He has attended regularly ever since. I suspect he will never join the Adventist Church but I believe he will be in God's eternal kingdom. Maybe, just maybe I helped him on his way. To God be the glory! Over many years I have been praying for Peter. A non-interested person, he has now started attending Quaker meetings and enquiring into things of a spiritual nature. Praise God! I pray there will be many more. I cannot match the "success" of some who work for the Kingdom, but I hope I can play my part.

I found SDA Kinship on the internet. With some trepidation, I googled "Gay Adventist" thinking I would find nothing. I was staggered. Here was a bunch of gays and lesbians who were/are part of the Adventist Church. I had to pinch myself to see if I was dreaming. I joined Kinship immediately and was privileged to attend the first European Kinship Kampmeeting in the summer of 2002. We were a small gathering, but soon became soul-mates as we heard each other's stories and talked our way through the horrors of growing up gay and Adventist. That first meeting was crucial. It restored my faith in the Adventist Church. I had not been entirely happy with the idea of joining MCC. Their inter-denominational approach was wonderful in many ways but I would have difficult issues in the long run. I knew I could not exchange Sabbath for Sunday evening. I don't have time to be involved fully in both the Seventh Day Adventist and Metropolitan Communities churches. Something had to give.

I had long dreamed of living in the mountains of the Scottish Highlands. My heart lived there. Not in suburbia. The noise, pollution, congestion, vandalism and general public attitude of Southeast

England was very stressful. Though I thought it was impossible, a brief series of events led me to make the decision to uproot, sell my house and move to Scotland. Because I am self employed, the advent of the internet and cheap flights made it possible for me to continue working from home, traveling to my clients, and writing software with no real interruption. In the summer of 2003 I relocated to Crieff, a sleepy little town on the edge of the Highlands. The move had taken one very difficult year but it was well worth it. I could not have grown the way I have grown or been part of SDA Kinship in that way that I am if I had stayed where I was. I settled in, started to make friends, joined the local SDA Church and became quickly involved. I attended MCC (in Edinburgh) as well as the Sabbath Services in Crieff. Both were wonderful, both got me involved but I know I had to make one of them a priority.

I chose a five day Iona pilgrimage to seek answers to important questions. For those of you who do not know it, Iona is an island off the west coast of Scotland. It has been called a *thin place*; one of those locations where heaven and earth seem to touch. It has been a Christian settlement and worship center since the 6th century. There St Columba first brought Christianity to the people of ancient Scotland. It is a special spot where one can reach out to God in ways that are difficult anywhere else on earth. In those five days I spent much time in prayer. I asked God, *When do I come out to my pastor? Should I throw myself totally into MCC, totally into the Adventist Church or both? Should I move to Edinburgh or Glasgow and get back into the gay scene?* The beautiful surroundings and good weather created an atmosphere where the heart searching moments spent with God affirmed me in my present journey.

I went to the first three European Kinship Meetings and agreed to arrange the fourth in Scotland. My professional life requires the ability to organize; I can do that well. My problem was arranging the meeting on my own doorstep and finding speakers. Clearly I had to come out. I noticed an announcement for a seminar on diversity to be held at Newbold college. By God-incidence, for I don't really believe in co-incidence, I happened to get a couple of day's work in the Newbold area and attended the seminar. Though it addressed topics unrelated to my journey, I was given the opportunity to talk with Helen Pearson. I have known her distantly for years. Meeting her at that meeting gave me the courage to talk with her. I took a deep breath, prayed silently, and asked her if she could think of any potential speakers for a SDA Kinship meeting. Remarkably she knew Ron Lawson from many years back, she knew about Kinship and,

although she was surprised to learn about my sexual orientation, she didn't bat an eyelid. She affirmed me tremendously. I was amazed and highly relieved. She and her husband, Dr. Mike Pearson, were wonderful lead speakers at our 4th European Kinship Meeting in Dunblane, Scotland.

Since Dunblane is only 25 kilometers from my home I knew it would be only a matter of time before my pastor learned of our meeting and of my participation in it. I decided to take the bull by the horns and talk to him first. At this point in time, Llewellyn Edwards had been my pastor for a couple of years. We knew each other fairly well. I had every confidence that I could talk to him. I prayed, I knocked on his office door, and I spoke with him. I don't remember much of our conversation, I do know that he too was affirming. He said he would both attend as much of the meeting as he could and would be pleased to lead the opening Worship on the Friday evening. In the last two years we have had many interesting discussions on the subject of homosexuality. He has assured me that he will stand up for me against anyone who speaks against me. I hope that never happens. In case it does, I know that I have a close ally in him. Thank you, Llew, for all your friendship, support and for the assurance that God's grace is for all. You have smoothed my pathway more than you will ever know. I am sorry if this has been a burden for you. I wish that all Christians had your nature.

Dunblane is a very small country town in central Scotland. It boasts a beautiful cathedral and an interdenominational Christian Retreat Centre run by the Church of Scotland. There are a couple of pubs, restaurants, a supermarket and a railway station. European Kampmeeting was September 2005. There is a full write up of the meeting in the autumn 2005 copy of the Connection magazine, so I will not duplicate our story here. For me as the organizer, it was physically draining. The spiritually uplifting experience was one I would not have missed for the world. I spent quality time with God. I did it with gay and lesbian Christian friends. I was able to be myself in the company of revered Church people. I felt totally accepted by them. This was an incredible experience. I wish every gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual and intersex Christian could enjoy and be blessed in the same way.

Helen led a real-time interactive presentation of the story of the raising of Lazarus. People in the group were invited to take a position based on where they felt they were in their coming out journey: still bound, coming out, being released, being an unbinder, moving on, bystanding,

judging, curious, onlooking etc. I realized I had been called to Come Out. I had been unbound, and was rushing out of the tomb of oppression and despair. I was free to follow my Lord the way he made me. Thank you Mike and Helen for showing me the way to freedom. Thank you, Lord, for unbinding me. That weekend, I became free. Being free doesn't mean my difficulties are over. I still have battles ahead. I am much better able to face them now.

I am not a great movie-goer. In my childhood it was frowned upon. Even now, in Britain not many Adventists go to the movies. We just wait until the

DVD comes out. When Brokeback Mountain hit the silver screen in early 2006 I made an exception and went to the cinema. I enjoyed the film. It's quite beautiful in its own way - a gay love story. It's not seedy or steamy; just pathetic and tear-jerking. Aaaaah! But there was one scene almost at the end that caught me unaware. Jack and Ennis were arguing about how Jack had always wanted Ennis to commit fully to their relationship. He

wanted to set up home, start a business, go to the mountains, go fishing and just be together. Ennis had always held back. Ennis was afraid. He couldn't leave his wife, his children, his area, his comfort zone. They never got properly together but lived separate, sad, unfulfilled lives. When Ennis dies Jack is left to grieve a lover who never gave himself fully to the relationship. As I watched those closing scenes the screen became transparent. The characters became fuzzy and indistinct although I could hear plainly what each was saying. Through the picture I became aware of another plane of seeing. I saw myself listening to Jesus. He was saying things like *I always wanted to bring you to my home, I just wanted to be with you. I wanted you to share your life with me but you had so many other things, so many fears, so many doubts getting in your way.* I felt unimaginably sorrowful that I had let my Lord, my greatest Love down in such a way. I wanted to with Jesus forever. And then I was back watching the movie again. The vision had faded, but the memory of it lasts. Now I know that I will be with Jesus forever. I heard more of the voice of Jesus in that moment at the movies than in many a sermon.

If I can help somebody, the old song goes, then my living will not be in vain. Almost everyone tries to answer the question *why am I here?* Most gay people probably also ask the question *why am I gay?* I imagine that gay Christians start off by raging at God, *why did you make me gay?* I don't have God's omniscience so I don't know the answer to that question. I do know that God has a reason for

**Almost everybody
tries to answer
the question, *why
am I here?***

making me gay or allowing me to turn out gay. I sometimes struggle with the notion that it might have been God's deliberate original will that I be gay but in some ways it doesn't matter. Either way, I have a deep conviction that my being gay is in accordance with some part of the Divine Plan. Many many incidents in my life have convinced me of this. And, if that's OK with God, then it's sure OK with me. For a long time, the burden on my heart these days has been to help other struggling gay Christians to reconcile their gayness and their faith. If I help only one queer Christian on his or her journey towards the Kingdom then I will know that God is working his purpose out in my life. My prayer is that I may be able to help not one, but many.

January 2006 saw me on my way to Ontario, California. The sun shone from a cloudless sky. The temperatures were in the eighties. I enjoy getting out from under the wet grey clouds and chill winds of a Scottish winter. I was heading for a conference organized jointly by SDA Kinship and the Association of Adventist Forums: *Christianity and Homosexuality - an Adventist Perspective*. I felt privileged to have been invited as an observer. Never before have world-class Seventh Day Adventist theologians, academics, psychologists, sociologists, administrators and pastors met together with a number of gay and lesbian SDA Kinship Members for open dialogue. Without doubt this was to be a momentous occasion. The papers presented at the conference will soon be published as a book. The movement for acceptance of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered and intersex Seventh Day Adventists is slowly gathering momentum. I dream of the day when a gay or lesbian couple can go into any Adventist Church and be accepted as part of the Church family. I dream of a day when single gay and lesbian Adventists will feel perfectly at home growing up in the Church of their forebears. I dream of a day when we will be united in our diversity. We are all special people, all part of God's everlasting kingdom. May that Kingdom be a reality very soon.



Building Intimacy

Michele O'Mara

Indiana, USA

Intimacy requires risk. Big risks! Intimacy requires that we literally undress ourselves (emotionally, intellectually, socially, spiritually and sometimes even physically) with another who is willing to do the same. And once undressed, we must be willing to:

1. Be Seen
2. Be Accepted
3. Be Known
4. Be Loved

It's much easier to do the seeing, the accepting, the knowing and the loving. In fact, I propose that gay men and women are probably above-average on this side of intimacy for all of the practice we have diverting attention from questions about us! It's the other side of intimacy that we tend to neglect. The other side requires that we allow ourselves to be real. To keep up our end of intimacy we must reveal ourselves, our truest selves, without apology, and open ourselves to the acceptance of those we love. Without both sides of intimacy - the knowing, and the being known, intimacy can't exist. Intimacy is reciprocal. Intimacy is mutual.

Gay men and women have a long history of censoring their self-disclosures, monitoring (and sometimes reshaping) behaviors to fit in, withholding feelings and thoughts out of a fear of being "inappropriate," or "socially unacceptable." What heterosexuals take for granted, gay men and lesbians consider a risk, or being brave. How many same-sex couples do you see kissing hello and goodbye at the airport? How about pictures of same-sex partners on the office desk? (Clarification, that is, the pictures on the desk, not the partners on the desk). Or how many stories do you hear about romantic getaways from gay men or women in the break room at work. And for those who do share, how well are they received? How then, are we really supposed to learn to truly be intimate, to let down our guards and believe that who we are - just as we are - is actually loveable?

What's the opposite of intimacy? "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," says it all. We live in a society that institutionalizes our silence, that prohibits our legal expression of love, and leaves us fearing our safety if we hold our partner's hand in public. Hmmm... do you think any of this could have to do with why some of us struggle with intimacy?

The same walls that keep us feeling safe, end up keeping intimacy out. We float through our life feeling disconnected because in many ways we are. We are a generation of gay men and women who are increasingly visible, and marginally accepted, though we are not yet embraced, because we are not yet embracing ourselves.

So how do we change this? We must get intimate with ourselves. (No, not that kind of intimate). I'm talking about learning to see ourselves, accept ourselves, know ourselves and love ourselves. How can we be taken seriously otherwise? To achieve this, we must start to take risks. Remember, intimacy requires risk. What is a risk for you (coming out to someone you care about), may not be a risk for the next person (who is a gay rights activist). There is no judgment about the type of risk you take - you'll know if it's a risk because your heart rate will increase, your stomach may flip-flop, you may even break a sweat. When you feel like you can't do it because you fear rejection, you fear ridicule, you fear loss, think about what you'd rather lose, your true self, or _____ (you fill in the blank). The key is to do it anyway.

See yourself for who you truly are. Accept yourself by acknowledging one thing about yourself every day that you are absolutely grateful for. Know yourself by stepping into your opinions, feelings and beliefs - don't hide them - they define you, and if you don't define yourself, others will define who you are for you! Lastly love yourself. When you see yourself, know yourself, and accept yourself, you will love yourself!



Kinship News

Someone to Talk To

—Carrol Grady

I want to share some feedback we've been getting lately. A woman who attended the Spokane Adventist Forum wrote: *"I love the conclusions you came to at the end of your lecture. They allow for love to flow between parents and their children. They also gave me a better understanding and a choice of acceptance with the gay people I know. I am sure that as we read about the pain people go through, we will want to make life happier for others and not be so critical and judgmental. I am wondering if it takes having a gay person in our immediate family before we are willing to be truly open minded and willing to be accepting without placing restrictions on their behavior. I don't know how I would manage but I pray that being informed will certainly make it easier to deal with. Loving all people is what I want to strive for. I thank you for giving me a better understanding of the few gay friends I have. If a member of my family ever comes out to me I will be ready with understanding and love because of you."*

A woman who attended my presentations at the Spiritual Renaissance Retreat wrote to say that her hairdresser had shared feelings about having a gay son. The workshop participant was able to pass along my book and other resources. Another attendee was a classmate from La Sierra who suspected her son was gay and wanted to develop a way for him to feel safe to

come out to her. I had many conversations with other people who also have gay family members.

I'm hoping to find time over the next few months to write a series of Bible

studies on the topic of homosexuality and to reorganize my website to make different kinds of information more accessible.

From February 27-March 3 Floyd Poenitz and Mike Richhart helped me with my booth at the "Just Claim It!", Youth Prayer Conference in Dallas. I will write more details of this extraordinary experience in the April issue

Australia

—Noel Thorpe

Kinship Australia's website has been updated to reflect our membership in New Zealand. The Australian Newsletter One To One is also available on our site: www.sdakinshipaustralia.org

Gifts

—Naveen Jonathan and Catherine Taylor

Autumn winds pitched rusting leaves across Princeton's campus. Swirls of grass clippings, rose petals, seed pods and other detritus of the growing season flowed into college gardens. Rivulets of dust and weed remnants packed themselves against the roots of often well kept shrubbery. A senior student strode across his territory, sharing some point of expansive interest with a younger classman. Crossing the

gardens he stopped to share his shock that the floral perfection he expected of his school had been marred by nature herself. Eyeing an older man, dressed in khaki clothes and a gardener's hat as he bent lovingly over weathered bushes, the senior raised his voice: "Sir! This is an important college. I do not want the reputation of my alma mater tarnished by uncared for hedges. Please, get a rake, do your job, clean up this mess!" The old man, smiled, acknowledged the rebuke, and went to get a rake and garden cart. The senior strode on, satisfied with a job well done and Princeton's honor intact. "There" he said. "That is how you should be learning to protect the name of this great institution." The younger man looked at him, thought for a moment and quietly said "You just told Albert Einstein to go rake leaves."

In our Kinship community, as on that autumn day, there are remarkable people "dressed in humble clothing". Because of our orientation or gender, our church and often our families or communities denigrate what we have to offer our tiny, needy planet. We have engineers who preach inspiring sermons working on church social committees because that is where the church feels safe putting them. We have former pastors who have had to retrain or work in paraprofessional jobs because the church refused their gifts. We have dedicated and talented teachers who remain in the church closet or who have had to go to public schools because their congregations were not large enough to hold honesty. We have people gifted with every measure of the Holy Spirit's promise who have had to use those God given talents in venues where they were appreciated. The church has suffered the loss.

God tells us we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" in His image. He has bestowed upon each of us the beautiful gifts that make us unique. Often times we lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered and intersex persons hide our gifts because of internalized homophobia. Sadly, sometimes members of our Kinship or other gay community do not honor those gifts. We look to "experts" or speakers outside of ourselves because we have come to believe they are more interesting or more valuable.

This year SDA Kinship International has chosen to honor and recognize, in a special way, the God given talent among us. During Kampmeeting 2007 in San Francisco almost every workshop presenter and musician will be from the gay or Kinship community. You will have the opportunity to learn from early morning worship, Bible Studies, personal growth seminars, language classes, skill building opportunities, health and well being classes, Children's Vacation Bible School, music lessons, leadership training, Wednesday tours, communion, concerts and much more. Because of our other commitment to inclusivity we are also welcoming wonderful pastoral speakers to our morning and some evening meetings. We invite you to this festival of Holy Spirit given gift, opportunities and adventures!!



Don't compromise yourself.
You are all you've got.

-Janis Joplin





Photo: John Zander

Kampmeeting 2007

Naveen Jonathan and the Region 8 Support Team

Plans for Kampmeeting 2007, scheduled for July 22-29, are well under development. We have found a wonderful venue at the San Francisco Airport Sheraton Hotel. The registration form is included in this Connection may also be available on line. An added bonus this year is that Kinship has negotiated with United Airlines to give us a substantial discount (7-15% off regular airfare) for those who are coming to Kampmeeting. More details are on the Kinship website.

A Brief Overview

Registration is available at 3PM Sunday afternoon. Introductions begin at 6PM and our welcome to Kampmeeting Luau is at 6:30. We cannot wait for you to meet our wonderful evening speaker for that night! We've already mentioned some of the weekday workshop offerings but want to make sure you know that Wednesday is "free day" when you and your friends can explore the fabulous city and surrounding areas. To honor the international nature of our Seventh Day Adventist heritage, the meals for each day will feature a different country of the world. On Friday night we have our sacred ritual of the communion service-a very special time for many of us. On Sabbath we will worship in song and celebration. You know this will be the best music to be found in the Adventist church! Later we will have

the opportunity to share our stories, indulge in a summer Thanksgiving Feast and enjoy a vespers concert with Jason and DeMarco.

Children's Program

"Celebrating the Gift of ME"

Kinship Kampmeeting is child-friendly! For the past two years, Linda Wright has conducted amazing programs for your children who are encouraged to attend with you. This year Linda's children's program theme is "Celebrating the Gift of ME." Let your children have the fun of celebrating their own unique gifts through music, games, crafts



and lots of fun learning experiences! Located in a room adjacent to the main meeting rooms, childcare for children from birth through age 12 will be provided for morning, afternoon and evening sessions.

Kampwork Subsidy

We want to make sure everyone can attend this year's week long celebration. To that end Kinship is offering a "Kampwork Subsidy". In exchange for financial support we have a wide variety of ways you can participate in and support the activities of Kampmeeting. Some of those are listed on the registration form. If you are interested in being a part of the Kampwork subsidy program, let us know when you register and indicate on your form where you would most like to work. You may contact our treasurer, Karen Wetherell at karenbwetherell@cs.com if you have questions or financial concerns.

Supporting Your Business

We are excited to announce a new opportunity for members of our Kinship family to network, even if you do not attend. We have developed a way for you to place your business card in the program booklet for the Kampmeeting attendees. This opportunity is extended to Kinship members who are professionals or who have your own businesses offering products or services, or who work for a company that is truly gay-supportive. For a minimum donation of \$25, you may send us your card and we will find a special place for it in the welcome booklet. All reproductions of your 2x3.5 business cards will be in black and white. Mail your check and your card to Karen Wetherell, Treasurer, SDA Kinship International, 90 Putnam Road, Springfield, VT 05156. Who knows - someday we just may have our own Kinship Yellow Pages!

More Volunteer Opportunities

As you consider coming to Kampmeeting, also think about lending us a hand. We have a myriad of needs, and the gifts of your helping hands would be greatly appreciated. Let us know either through email or through the Kampmeeting registration form

Our Signature Event: The Talent Show

"If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair!" (sung by Scott McKenzie). This year, San Francisco's celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Summer of Love inspired us with the theme for our talent show. 1967: Summer of Love will feature songs and events from the 1960s. Many industry experts say the songs from the 1960s will influence music forever. We want to revive the best for our talent show Saturday night! We are asking you, our talented members, to practice your best songs from the decade, put together some fabulous outfits and come to Kampmeeting ready to perform your hearts out. Choose something from your favorite Broadway



If you didn't live in the '60s or would just like to research more information about that colorful decade, its music, and its culture, here are a few of the many online resources we have found:

Summer of Love (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summer_of_Love)

Top 100 Hits of 1967 (<http://www.musicoutfitters.com/topsongs/1967.htm>)

History of the Musical Stage: 1960s (<http://www.musicals101.com/1960bway2.htm>)

Rock 'n' Roll in the 1960s (<http://faculty.smu.edu/dsimon/change-music%2060s.html>)

Chronology of San Francisco Rock (<http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist1/rock.html>)

Show of the '60s-Hello Dolly!, Funny Girl, Fiddler On The Roof, Man of La Mancha or Cabaret. Do some rock 'n' roll like Elvis Presley, or sing some soul like Aretha Franklin. Get your friends together and be the fabulous Diana Ross & the Supremes, catch the mania of the Beatles, or turn into the cool, hip Beach Boys. Even if you're not performing, we would still like for you to dress up. So style your bouffant high like Jackie Kennedy or wear your side burns as proudly as Elvis. Don't forget to dig out the psychedelic shirts or those blue suede shoes. The 1960s were the most turbulent period of social change in our nation's history. Even though some of the events of the '60s involved things such as "free love" and drugs we appreciate that your performances be done without reference to drug use or sex. We're going to have children, parents and grandparents present. We want to make sure this event is fun and entertaining for everyone who will be present. We want our performances to WOW our audience. Bring your songs and outfits. Come one, come all to the "beautiful city by the bay" and celebrate the '60s, Kinship style. Remember these concepts are . . . "A-B-C it's easy as 1-2-3, or simple as do-re-mi! A-B-C, 1-2-3, baby, you and me!" (sung by the Jackson 5). You can sign up on your registration form or at Kampmeeting as late as the Thursday morning of our celebration week.

▼

The opposite of love is not hate.
It is indifference.

The opposite of art is not ugliness.
It is indifference.

The opposite of faith is not heresy.
It is indifference.

The opposite of life is not death.
It is indifference.

Elie Wiesel





connection ▽

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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.

Mini-Kampmeeting at Rehoboth

April 20-22, 2007

Featured Speaker: Mitchell Tyner, Associate General Counsel, GC, (Ret.)

FOR QUESTIONS & TO RSVP, WRITE TO Yolanda Elliott at yselliott@aol.com
PAYMENT DUE : On or before April 15, 2007



Women & Children First Weekend

July 20-22, 2007

San Francisco, California

We will be staying at the Sheraton Gateway Hotel, the same one being used for Kampmeeting.

For information please contact Yolanda Elliott, the Women's Coordinator at women@sdakinship.org or yselliott@aol.com





Family Outings

By Elena Davis-Stenhouse

Before we got pregnant and met our beautiful daughter, Chloe Sage, my partner and I at times questioned whether or not we were ready to have a baby yet -- because of the fact that we occasionally felt awkward and fearful about outing ourselves. While we're both completely out to everyone of any importance in our lives, it is the strangers and the continuous dilemma of "to out or not to out" that causes us to pause and examine how truly comfortable we are with baring our souls to the world. And, with a baby, the questions pour in. It's the little things. When I tell the woman cutting my hair about my beautiful 13-month-old daughter, she casually asks "So, is your husband watching your baby today?" It's also the woman behind us at the supermarket checkout line who innocently asks "So, which one of you is her mother?" But the worst is the oblivious nurse who asks "Is this your sister?" (Or worse yet, "Is this your mother?!). Sometimes, I just get tired of the question. A few weeks ago, Erin and I were ending a lengthy shopping-trip at the mall, pushing Chloe in a stroller through my favorite clothing store. A sales woman came over to admire Chloe and asked "Does she look like her father?" Erin, tired from a long day, simply stated "I don't know." The look on the sales woman's face was priceless - she had no idea how to respond to this! Erin and I turned and erupted into a fit of giggles as we sauntered off, enjoying a hearty laugh at the expense of good-natured heterosexism!

The wonderful thing is that having Chloe Sage in our lives had forced us to confront our own internalized homophobia and our fears of other's reactions. We once and for all are empowered to stand up tall, give a big smile, and let our family composition be known for all the world to see. The result has been liberating and joyful. The girls at the sub shop that we go to each week, gush "Oh, how adorable she is! She looks just like both her mommies!" A little old blue-haired lady (who I stereotype as being too "conservative" to accept us), says "How wonderful for two women to have a baby together! I never thought of that!" So, as we enjoy our fun family outings each week we are also enjoying the experiences of our "family outing". It's yet another stepping stone on this miraculous journey called parenthood.