

connection ▽

The Journal of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. January 2007 Vol. 31 No. 1



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

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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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Growing into Love

Ruud Kieboom
Den Haag, Netherlands

I didn't really think I was different when I was younger because I did not know how others would be. There were certain feelings I kept to myself because I didn't know what others felt. I didn't want to share because I didn't know if they were acceptable or "right". I remember being in primary school at this stage but I was too young to know if I was gay or not. I remember a teacher that I thought was very beautiful. I still remember gestures or ways of talking that he had. I don't think I realized it had anything to do with being gay. It just happened. Around this same time I realized that I liked to look at guys.

When I was in fourth or fifth grade, my sister began to date the man who became her husband. Because they were not married, when he came to visit our home, he slept with me. I was exploring with my hands his body to see what it was like to have a grown man's body. His body was very interesting to me. My brother-in-law knew I was gay. He even brought me to an organization for Sexual Reformation of Understanding of Sexuality and I talked to someone. I don't remember anything about the conversation. I think I was too young for this to make an impression. I remember the tea and cookies.

During this time period a guy took me with him into the dressing room of our local public swimming pool. That was my first experience with a man. I asked him "Am I gay now?". He was in his early twenties or late teens. I had not known him before. I was not afraid. This did not feel like child sexual abuse to me. Over the next couple of years, I had the same type of encounter with this man. The idea of wrong or of not wrong had not occurred to me yet. For years afterwards when I got a strange feeling whenever I came to the pool, it was in my



body. I had to go to the bathroom, like when you drink coffee. I do not think that this harmed me. I don't have that part in my conscience. In one way I found it very interesting to see a grown up man. I have never been afraid. I have never hated men for it. I don't think of it. I don't dream of it. One of my school mates talked about him so I know he was doing this with other boys. I saw him many years later and then I thought "Is he still doing this and is he doing

this with children?".

I thought I might be homosexual but nobody told me and I asked nobody but him. I think he avoided an answer.

Between the ages of 10 and 17 I came to realize that I liked boys; I found them very beautiful. I knew I was different. When the boys played games and explored each other, they were fine with ending the game. I was the one that wanted to go on and wanted to play the game again. I had no guilt. I was in a process of learning about myself and how I related to others. In all the others ways I think I was a normal child. It is only with these feelings. It didn't play such a big role in my life; only that I knew I liked to see a nice man.

I remember when I was in secondary school I would stay away from girls who were interested in me. I knew I could not give them what they wanted or what they deserved. I think now, looking back on this, I must have realized I was gay by the time I was sixteen or seventeen years old. I had read about broken marriages between gay and straight people and I did not think it would be fair.

I grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church. When my aunt and her family came back from Australia in 1971 I met Seventh Day Adventists. My cousin told me the Seventh Day Adventists had Bible studies. I was baptized in 1978 and went to Israel for two years. At age 25, this was my first time away from

my parent's home and on my own. I was dealing with both my religion and my sexuality. When I came back I began to wonder if it was permissible to be gay. I had read about this issue in the church materials. I don't really remember anything specific I found that really bothered me.

In Dutch society at that time homosexuality was talked about in good ways and bad ways. It was really important to me to find out God's opinion about this. I had some one night stands but no relationships. These were really one hour stands. I never stayed with anyone. I never had intercourse because I was afraid of getting a disease. We only touched each other to satisfy each other. If any man wanted more, I would stop because I did not want it. After the one hour stands I was very depressed. They were sinful things in my eyes. I was not out to the church and I was very afraid to show up with a guy all of a sudden. No one ever taught me it was okay.

When I was 32 years old, I realized I was in love with my best friend of many years. We were spending lots of time together because he was getting a divorce. We were training for an event here called The Four Days March. For Peter, it was a relief to have a friend with whom he could speak. For me it was something different. During the marches, he had a difficult time because he was in love with a new woman; the younger sister of a woman who was attracted to him. One night he cried on my shoulder. He asked me "why did you never have a girl friend?" The next night was my turn to cry on Peter's shoulder and I told him everything. This was the beginning of my coming out to others. I told him my story. He really wanted to help me. This was one of the most important periods of my life. But the more Peter tried to help me the more I fell in love with him. We did not want to lose each other so this was very difficult. I found it helpful to be able to talk about myself; to talk about the things of which I was ashamed. I could tell him all these things. He listened. He didn't have answers. He just tried to help me accept myself. He embraced me. I was not used to that. My parents did not hug very much.

It was important to me that Peter was an Adventist because I wanted to have answers from someone who was religious and who believed somewhat the same as I believed. Acceptance and self acceptance was the most important thing that happened. He lead me to read the Bible more carefully and to become more self accepting. He read the Bible in a more modern context. Peter dared to say "but this isn't true anymore". He didn't have the answer; He would say "I do not know this myself" but I know this is not wrong. He was patient with me. I do not think many people would have kept such a

friendship. But we had been close for a very long time. Peter had his difficult time and then I had my difficult time. Sometimes I would call him in the middle of the night and he would say "Come on over" and I would sleep next to him and talk. Later he said he had thought about giving up our friendship because I was taking so much of his energy during this process. I think he kept the friendship because he is faithful and we like each other. We also had a lot of fun, even through the difficulties. We joked and swam together and did the things that friends do. It was difficult for me and good for me.

The other wonderful thing is that he only talked to his sister. When I would have questions he could not answer, Peter would ask me if he could ask his sister, a social worker. So she, with my permission, knows about that time in my life. This was a two year process for me. I told my father and my mother. My mother was sad for me because she felt sorry for me that I would not have a woman and children. Of course I did not want that. For the rest of the issue it was okay. My father said "well, I thought you might be gay but you never talked about it so I didn't bring it up." I had expected it to be easier with my mother but my father just said "Well, okay, you are gay". My father said "I don't think you have to make an announcement that you are gay. People in your life never told you they were heterosexual and I think they can find out when you find a partner." So, others in my family found out when I came with Kees to meet them.

I started to talk with people who were important to me in the church. Some had the same reaction as my father. Nobody made a problem. My pastor did not respond so well. He didn't really understand what it meant. He is the one who disappointed me. His question was "Do you want to be a woman?". I had a long talk with him but I realized he didn't understand what it meant to be homosexual. He said he was going to think about it and read about it but he never came back with anything. He said "I want to find a theological solution" but he never came with one. He would only ask me how I was doing when we were around other people. He only got his education from the church not from the university. He was more a pastor by experience and not by education. He had good qualities but not here. I also told Wim who is now my pastor. He accepted me but did not think I had made a good choice. I am not really sure what he thinks about it now. He greeted Kinship Europe when we came to Den Haag. He comes to dinner at my house. We go to dinner at his house. I should talk to him and find out what he thinks now.

I joined a group called Kringen (Circles). They are a gay group that gathers in people's homes. I

became part of that but I do not remember how I met them. This was during my coming out. This was my first experience of being with a group of gay people. They had speakers. And we could tell our stories if we wanted to. We would have one hour of discussion and one hour of socializing.

My coming out ended sometime in January or February of 1987. I didn't want to begin a relationship before then because I did not feel stable enough with myself to become involved with another person. I have seen people get involved with others when they were not ready. Those are not pleasant situations. I have to admit that this decision was easy because I had not been attracted to anyone other than my straight friend.

In February 1987 I saw a program on TV that was about "friends meeting friends". The program offered connections such as someone to walk with in the morning, have coffee, swim etc. "Friends meeting friends" included those who wanted platonic friendships and those who were looking for serious relationships. I wrote and said "I am a gay man looking for a gay man." About May I got three responses. These were the people that the organization thought would be best for me after I had filled out an extensive questionnaire describing my personality and relational wishes. From those three I chose Kees. That is how we met.

Peter drove me to my first date with Kees. I had him drop me off and told him to pick me up in two hours in case this did not work. When he came back I realized the time had flown by. I was quite happy to have met Kees. From that day, Kees and I never dated anyone else. I met one other guy just because I thought I should not just meet only one person. It turns out that this guy had been referred to Kees but that had not worked out. So we did not have a second meeting. Kees was my first and only date. At the beginning we were together from Friday evening until Monday morning. Then we began to stay together from Thursday evening until Tuesday morning. Kees would come to my house. We were able to spend more time together when we bought our own computer and Kees was able to do his translation work at my house.

In 1994, seven years after we met, Kees and I began to live together. We had our relationship ratified by a lawyer as a life contract to make sure that if anything happened to one of us the other would be able to keep everything. At this time, our contract was all that was legally offered to us. We bought a house together because we wanted to make a fresh start that was in a place both of us shared from the beginning. Our relationship was legalized and we moved in together on February 14, 1994.

We were able to get married in 1998 on May 13. If Kees and I wanted it, I know that Gerard, the Ministerial Secretary of the Dutch Union or my former pastor would anoint our union outside of church. Gerard says that the first house he was ever invited to was the home that Kees and I share. We had a town hall wedding and many people came from the church. This was before I knew Kinship. Peter was one of the witnesses.

I work for the government and Kees translates books from the Hebrew into Dutch. He knows Greek and Latin but is not translating those languages into books right now. He did teach but he doesn't want to be a police officer in the classroom like you have to be now.

Peter and his girlfriend had been part of my Seventh Day Adventist congregation's young adult group when Peter brought up the topic of homosexuality at a meeting. The church had a 90 minute conversation about it where I did not talk much. At the end of the discussion I came out and said I was gay and that I was very grateful for the discussion. They were positive and emotional. There were no negative reactions. A few years ago, the former girlfriend moved to America and sent me a leaflet about Kinship that she found on a church pew.

I put the leaflet in a safe place because America was so far away. I could not imagine what Kinship could do for me in Holland. We didn't have internet in our home until 2001. That year I tried to find out if Kinship still existed, just out of curiosity. When I typed in the word "Kinship" I got a chapter of references. One of them, far down the line, was SDA Kinship International. I had to write twice because I did not get a response the first time. The second time I wrote, six months later, I got a response from Floyd. He was my first Kinship contact. He wrote back and I became a member. Floyd also made me a member of Kinnet. I never got the welcoming packet until 2006! I wanted the Ben Kemena article. I became a silent new member.

I do not think this long wait was a good thing. If I had not had my coming out already this would have been more important for me and I would have needed to have heard from someone sooner.

Through Kinnet I came in contact with Reino in Sweden. He wanted to meet other Kinship members from Europe. He suggested that we organize a meeting. He didn't know how to do it. I said, "Okay, if we can come to your place I will arrange it." Kinship Europe came into existence under a huge, ancient tree in Reino's gardens. Bob Bouchard, Kees, myself, Mike Lewis, Roy and Pieter, Willy, Reino and Ingemar met. The next year I offered to organize Kinship Meeting 2 in Den Haag, Holland. I found a place very near my house. So I

put a notice on Kinnet. We ended up having twenty five people from Holland, Germany, France, Spain, Norway, the US, Sweden and Belgium. The next year in Den Haag our twenty seven participants even included some members from Australia.

My spirituality has gone from a bit conservative to liberal. I am very free about my orientation. When people ask me I just say "I am gay". I have a wonderful partner in Kees. I feel free and secure with him. Kees has helped me to get my religion in a place that is very comfortable for me. I have learned a lot from him about not being a Scribe or a Pharisee anymore. I do not keep the Sabbath in quite the same way. I was very strict in my food and things like that. He helped me to be free from that rigidity too. I think my new way is better. The church taught me the rules to find a certain freedom. But Kees helped me to find the freedom in the rules. I think self acceptance is the first thing to strive for but everyone has their own way to reach that. I had to accept myself before I could tell others who I am. It is very important to have someone we can talk to. These are the two things that freed me; someone to talk with and self acceptance. If we have someone to talk to, we accept ourselves more easily. This year there was a funeral of Peter's mother. I was there with Kees. I talked to another member of my church. He looked at us and said "I see peace when I look at you. When you two are together you radiate a feeling of peace and rest". I think this has to do with self acceptance. I would like for you to have this peace of being yourself.

Today I am a part of a church plant in Den Haag called Adventist Regional Kerk (Church). There are about 30 to 35 regular members. Sometimes we have 50 attending and sometimes we have 20. When I came out to my aunts, they cried because they were sad that they thought I was making a wrong choice. But, they loved me and they loved and welcomed Kees. My present pastor thought I was making a wrong choice but he has loved me and loved Kees and we have visited back and forth between each other's homes. I think their reaction is what I would want from the church, even if they have not studied enough to accept homosexuals who are in a relationship. I believe that even if they disagree with us, they should care for and love us like this pastor. I have people that I feel like this about. If they smoke I feel bad because I think they are hurting themselves but I still love them and care for them.



You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.

-Unknown

Heresy

Steven Schuetz
Washington, USA

I have always known I was gay. At my graduation ceremony from Wisconsin Academy in 1989 I attempted to tell my parents. Like countless others, I was so devastated by their reaction that I decided to "try" again. Throughout the early nineties I attended Newbold College. I fell in love with a boy and in strong like with a girl that I eventually married after we moved to Seattle. Years later, after attending graduate school, divorcing, leaving the Adventist church and committing to my partner, I am now working as a psychotherapist in Seattle. In my practice I have discovered that my story was not unique. I sit with dozens of men and women as they mourn the loss of their religious communities. Convinced that they can no longer endure the untenable dogma and hypocrisy of their religious congregations my clients have decided to leave. Now they find themselves lost; often mired in angst, self-doubt, hatred and tragically profound loneliness. Gone are the comfortable confines of faith. They find themselves wrapped in seclusion. When these clients come to my office, they often begin by sobbing. As part of faith communities their social needs had been met by the vast denominational network into which most of them were born. Many tell me that growing up they felt they were more devout, more pious than their peers. They were often rewarded for this devotion with impressive positions of leadership. They tell me of the joy they experienced as they worshiped. Now with scarlet letters firmly affixed to their personas, my clients find themselves angry, disdainful outcasts. My clients had learned to fear the out-group. Now they are the out-group but often don't have the skills necessary to connect with others. I am excited by their ordeals.

Yes, you read correctly. I am excited by their ordeals. Let me explain. In 1975 John Macquarrie wrote *Thinking About God*. In his chapter "On Heresy", John borrows from the kabalic notion that heresy was given to us by God as the antidote to complacency. In our Christian tradition we have a long history of heretics, including; Origen, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wycliffe, Bunyan and Kierkegaard. From the most recent century I would

like to add Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bishop Tutu. I believe we should also add the abundance of lesser known local social activists and heroes (such as the occasional Adventist Pastor that will clandestinely preside at a same-sex commitment ceremony).

There are a lot of “perks” to being a heretic. Heretics are extraordinarily persistent and resilient (In particular I am reminded of Luther brazenly pounding his 95 thesis onto the door of the Castle church in Wittenberg). I find that my clients also tend to hold these delicious qualities. They are resilient as they find new ways to worship. Some are able to integrate their sexual and religious selves and remain a part of their congregations. Sometimes they are allowed to offer their valuable contributions. Others decide that they can no longer tolerate the bigotry they have endured for so long. They creatively develop new spiritual practices; finding God in the solitude of a mountain hike or a tranquil lake. Still others reclaim sexuality as a way to experience the love of God. They find the luminous in the face of their partner. All of my clients are persistent. Their persistence keeps them searching for ways to heal; ways to honor themselves as God made them and not as an institution says they should be.

These beautiful gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual individuals and their supporters have been renounced by their churches as heretics. Their heresy is a gift. It helps us to collectively formulate new ways to discover and to worship God. It helps us to ameliorate and to heal the stagnancy of the “sleeping church”.



Christmas Through the Eyes of a Child

By Elena Davis-Stenhouse
Colorado, USA

This Christmas season, Erin and I have had the pleasure of seeing the magic of Christmas through fresh eyes. Our adorable daughter, Chloe Sage, will turn one year old on Christmas day! As we've put up Christmas lights, trimmed our tree, and baked cookies, we've marveled at how our lives have changed over the past twelve months. Last year we did not yet know the surprise of whether we would have a boy or a girl - and we surely had not met the personality of our little daughter who would steal our hearts.

A few weekends ago, we visited Erin's brother's family in Phoenix and had the pleasure of going to their church and attending “Cradle Roll”. Chloe had a wonderful time and was curious and amazed by everything and everyone. As the children gathered to hear about Christmas, the teacher asked “Whose birthday is Christmas?” The children exclaimed “Jesus!” I know when Chloe gets older, she will answer “Me! And Jesus!” Nothing could be more special and wonderful than sharing a birthday with Jesus. At one point, all the toddlers were given Christmas candles with bulb lights, the room lights were turned down, and the song Silent Night played. The little ones lifted up their candles over their heads and swayed back and forth in time to the music. It was a surreal experience for me that brought tears of indescribable joy to my eyes. As I watched these little, innocent babes with their pure love, I was struck by the feeling of being enveloped by God's love and seeing the beauty of each one of these children as evidence of God's miraculous presence.

We look forward to a wonderful 2007, full of continuing adventures and new experiences - as seen through Chloe's eyes. We wish each and every one of you a blessed 2007!



I am an Ambassador of Christ

Ornette D Clennon
England, Great Britain

"For you created my inner most being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" Psalm 139:13-16. Please note that "inner most being" is translated from the Hebrew kilyah, figuratively meaning, "seat of emotion and affection" (its literal meaning is "kidney"). As far as I am concerned, kilyah, in this context, refers directly to my sexuality.

"All Scripture is God breathed..." 2 Tim 3:16. If we truly believe the above text, why are we so hung up on our sexuality and (perhaps even more strangely) so eager to receive approval from a church full of fallible mortals? As a gay Christian, my only approval comes from God. Romans 8:29 already tells me that "...those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son..." I have to ask again; why does the opinion of certain elements of the Church matter to me? "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me" 1 Corinthians 4:4,5. God is

described as "...He who made you, who formed you in the womb and who will help you..." (Isaiah 44:2) . We should no longer waste our time trying to justify ourselves to people when God himself has already done that (Romans 8:30).

In the new Kingdom there will be no categories of gay or straight (or LGBTI) as people will "neither marry nor be given in marriage and they can no longer die for they are like angels" Luke 20:35, 36. In the new Kingdom (or for a thousand years at least!) we will be "priests of God and of Christ" Revelation 20:6. This side of eternity, we are asked to prepare for the new Kingdom by "...go(ing) and mak(ing) disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" Matthew 28:19.

Here is a scriptural breakdown of our work. Notice, it has nothing to with issues around sexuality: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..."

(Matthew 5:16) "...let your light shine before all, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Romans 5:19, 20) "...And he has committed to us a message of reconciliation. (v 20). We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us..." (Galatians 6:2)... "Carry each other's burdens and in this you will fulfill the law of Christ"

(Matthew 9: 12-13) "...Jesus said, It's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. (v 13) Go and learn what this

means : 'I desire mercy not sacrifice' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"

We need to be "...baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." for "...no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." We need to teach about God the Father because "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16) "...yet there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live... (1 Corinthians 8:6) "God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God and God in him" 1 John 4:16.

We need to teach about the Son because: "...there is but one Lord, Jesus, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:6.) "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:14,15.) "For God was pleased to have his fullness dwell in him..." (Colossians 1:19) "...the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39)

We need to teach about the Holy Spirit because "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:3,8) "But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into

all truth" (John 16:8) "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (Mark 12:30-31)

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. v 31 The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these" (John 14:23) "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching...." (John 15:10, 12, 13)

" If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's command and remain in His love. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." "The commandments, 'do not commit adultery', 'do not murder', 'do not steal', 'do not covet' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ' Love your neighbour as yourself' Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:9, 10)

Think about this huge irony. "You therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself" (Romans 2:1.) The very people who often condemn us, are themselves condemned by attitudes that lead us to feel excluded from the body of Christ. Ironically, it is we, who are in the perfect position to reach out to those (condemned) voices in the Church. We have the opportunity to teach them the true meaning of His commandments. Our sexual orientation has nothing to do

with our God-given mission to reach out to people. It just makes us better equipped to reach out to these who most need Christ.

I understand the need to re-examine Scripture with a fresh and inclusive LGBTI perspective. I also believe that we, as mature Christians, need to look beyond the confines of other peoples' labels. Our God-given labels of being "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..." 1 Peter 2:9 is all we need. Let us go about our God-given mission in confidence, not having to justify or apologize for who we are since we are in fact, "fearfully and wonderfully made". I do recognize the debilitating nature of the relentless lack of love from the Church, we all feel from time to time. We must not lose heart. "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" 2 Corinthians 4:17,17 Let us "go out in joy and be lead forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you (us) and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of the briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed" Isaiah 55:12,13.



Cataract Lessons

Rom Wilder

Virginia, USA

Lately our off-white walls have looked either pink or green to me. Today when Lynn brought our yellow lab in from a walk, I asked what in the world she'd gotten into. She (the dog, not Lynn) had dark hunter green patches where her darker yellow fur normally was. I've considered what this could mean. Probably cataracts. But I've also been thinking about reality and what it really is - or is not. Lynn says ShutterBug's fur wasn't a bit green. It looked green to me. Which of us was seeing it as it really is? Maybe if we each assumed all humans (including ourselves) have cataracts, it would be easier to understand why others don't see things as we do. Maybe if we realized we all see things differently, we might be more patient when others don't see life as we do.



Kinship Voices

We asked our members what they would like to see in their lives for the next twelve months



My dreams, plans and visions for myself include finishing my PhD and passing the

two licensing exams to become a licensed Marriage & Family Therapist in the state of California. I also look forward to continue maintaining the happy, contented spirit that I have reached in my life as well as continue growing in my walk with God. *Naveen*

I would like to rework my Someone to Talk to Website, write our family history, finish the 5th (of ten so far) grandchild quilt, and see the book published. *Carrol*



I'm going to return to Australia and finish my MBA. I'm looking forward to being a student again.

My other goal is to restart my life coaching business and actually live the advice that I give others, like slowing down, enjoying the journey, etc. *Scott*

I am heading off for graduate school and pulling together an art show for New York. I am looking forward to being more a part of our community. *Tami*

We are heading for Japan! I can't wait!! *Fern*

My plans for 2007 - try and

stay healthy so I can enjoy another spring, and hopefully summer. My wishes, Joy Love and happiness to friends and family, and the strength and good humor to tackle the challenges of the new year. *Peter*

My dreams and hopes for 2007 include advancing my career with T-mobile and bringing many more friends into my life. I also hope that 2007 will bring joy and happiness into all of my friends lives. *Jon*

My biggest wishes revolve around my need to be able to develop ways to relax; mentally, spiritually and physically in my new school environment. I also wish that my partner and I will be able to relocate to Tampa or even further south. My five artificial joints and my peripheral neuropathy can no longer handle the frigid New England winters! We pray that we will have enough cash in our pockets to be able to move in July, two months after the completion of my Medical Office Program. We pray that God will help us make the move, find jobs and locate an apartment where we can lay our heads. I pray for those who are less fortunate. As of January 20th, I will have been HIV positive for 27 years. I am grateful for each of those years. God is good! *Thor*

My goal for 2007 is to SPEND MORE! Yes, I plan to spend more time to nurture and nourish my relationship with God, with myself and with people who matter to me. I also plan to spend more time in the moment and not stress about the past or the future! *Pearl*

A friend of mine was very tired one night, so she went to bed without doing the dishes,

something quite unusual for her. In the morning she and her four year old daughter went into the kitchen to make breakfast. There were ants all over the unwashed dishes. Lisa was angry at herself for not doing the dishes the night before, and angry with the ants for -- well, for being ants! Four year old Anna put her hand on her mother's arm and said, "Mommy, forgive yourself. And forgive the ants." I hope this year each of us will forgive ourselves as easily as we forgive others. *Rom*

My cat Jacquie died of kidney failure. I hope to get another cat soon. *Heidi*



Kinship News

IMRU? Naveen Jonathan

Happy New Year! We hope and wish that 2007 will be a joyous and prosperous year for everyone. The IMRU? Leadership Team would like to announce a change in our leadership structure. Our women's coordinator Gwen Castro has left her position to pursue other endeavors in her life. The Leadership Team and members would like to thank Gwen for her service and contributions to the forum. For the time being Ruben Lopez will be coordinating membership activities for both the men and women of IMRU?. Watch for further announcements and happenings of IMRU? throughout 2007 and please feel free to contact us at IMRUGroup@gmail.com.

Australia - Noel Thorpe

This expression of appreciation has just come into our office.

I would like to affirm the work that Kinship has played so far in

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Life, Love, and Hope Defined

Thor Montgomery
Massachusetts, USA

In the season of new beginnings and great hope I have decided to share some of my personal history that informs the articles I write for The Connection. My wish is that this will give you hope in your future and provide another story with which you may identify. For all those who feel that life is too rough to go on or believe that God just doesn't care what happens to you, I offer the story of what has made me the person I am now and what will channel the rest of my life.

I grew up in a tremendously religious home. From my perspective today I would not consider it a Christian home. We were indoctrinated in the daily rituals of what my parents considered the Christian life: church going, adherence to daily devotions and, the pretense of living a life devoted to God's will. What I now know to be real Christianity; love, acceptance and compassion, were wholly absent from our existence. God was portrayed, almost literally, as the great punisher. We lived with daily beatings, dosed out by my dad and stepmother, for even the smallest perceived infraction of their never-ending, strict and unreasonable rules. Unfortunately for me, I always was one to please, no matter the cost. We were told to NEVER, EVER lie, and that we wouldn't be punished for admitting we had done something wrong. I blindly complied for many years. This brought more agonizing punishment. If it wasn't a beating, it was enforced writing of Biblical passages, chapter after chapter, adding to my distaste of what they called, "Christianity." I was beaten when I was found "exploring" the bodies of some male agemates. We were constantly told that if we did not want to follow our parents instructions to the letter, we could leave and they would help us pack.

At the age of 16, after years of this constant hell on earth, I tried precisely that. True to their word, they helped me gather what belongings I could fit into a backpack. I tried to enlist in the army but was encouraged to come back home. I had been home schooled for three years and asked that, if I was



going to try coming home, I be allowed to attend a public school. I had never been exposed to my peers. I wanted to learn what they enjoyed and did for fun. At that time the only activities I defined as "fun" were reading and fishing. My Dad agreed that I could go to public school if I so desired. However, when I did go home, I found out that they had completely deceived me. I was stuck under their patriarchal rules again.

The torturous existence under which I was living finally came to a head when my dad told me

to do something I had already completed. I refused to do it again. He almost levitated up to my room. Before I could run, he had knocked me to the ground and was kicking me as hard as he could in the abdomen while I tried in vain to cover my stomach in the fetal position. I told the pastor which was in charge of my parents congregation that I couldn't handle it anymore. He managed to get me enrolled in a Bible college which suited my parents beliefs.

I knew I was attracted to boys and not girls. While attending this Bible college, I decided to go to a Church group for the GLBT community in Seattle. There, I ran into what I thought must be true love, a guy who decided that I could be his boyfriend. He called the dorm at the college and my roommates put two and two together. They went to the dean and he asked me to leave or be expelled. I chose to leave and moved in with my "boyfriend" who couldn't handle a free-spirited 17 year-old.

My family's pastor found out and told my parents that I was homosexual. My parents immediately disowned me and wouldn't even talk to me except to tell me how disappointed they were and that I was never welcome to come "home" again. (Like I even wanted to at that point!) I felt betrayed by this so-called "pastor". I was angry that he had, essentially, broken my confidence and broken the oath of confidentiality he took when he received his Divinity degree.

My family of origin has refused to have an active role in my existence. In the past 17 years, they have

not called me. When someone asked them later if they would even attend my funeral if I died, their response was, "What would be the point? We considered him dead the moment we found out he was a homosexual." I have called to inquire as to their well-being but the conversation is very strained. One of my step-sisters does call me about once per year. I have learned to develop my own family from my friends and loved ones.

On my own again, I did fairly well for myself, all things considered. I managed to find an apartment, get a job, and had a very nice, but Spartan life. When I was sexually intimate, I ALWAYS used protection. I got tested for HIV regularly and my tests consistently came back negative. Eventually, a guy with whom I had once had an affair, and who was a supposed "Christian", told me that I could move in with him with absolutely "no sexual pressure and no strings attached."

I moved back to Seattle, and began to work as a private male escort to bring in enough money to pay my share of the bills. Despite his agreement, my roommate began offering to pay me to have sexual relations with him. I always stood by our original arrangement and declined his advances. At one point he gave me what I thought was a rum and coke. I was very liquor-naïve and did not know the meaning of 151-proof rum. I drank two of the poured drinks, and definitely was a bit buzzed. Shortly, I started to feel uncomfortably woozy and soon passed out, face down, on my bed.

When I woke up, barely aware, I realized that I was being taken sexually. In my dazed condition, I figured that it must be the guy whom I was dating. His build was almost identical to the roommate. After repeating my boyfriend's name and getting no response, I realized this was my roommate. I threw him across the room. He acted shocked that I reacted so violently and told me he thought I was enjoying his "attentions". He informed me, with a great deal of pride, that he had violated me more than seven times. I asked the obvious. He confirmed that he had not worn any protection. I was so upset that I went into the shower, and stayed there for over an hour; until the water ran cold.

My best friend told me this was a rape but I thought it was my fault since I had consumed alcohol. I think I must have also been drugged. The perpetrator was a nurse and had easy-access to many types of sedatives. That rapist would not tell me his HIV status.

I was terrified that I would run into him if I stayed in the Seattle area. I crossed the country and hopped into what I had hoped would be a "simple," house boy arrangement. The guy turned out to be immensely ugly, overweight, and an abusive drunk. One night when I told him I would not have sex

with him when he was intoxicated he hit me in the head with a clothes iron and gave me an awful concussion. I escaped to Covenant House. They paid for me to be examined and treated. I spent an uncomfortable forty five days there until I could find a way to provide myself with my own shelter and food.

Four months into my time in Ft. Lauderdale I met an officer of the Coast Guard who lived in Long Beach, California. He said he wanted to fly me out to clean and cook for him. I met him through a good friend so believed he was a safe and sane person. He didn't drink nor did he have abusive tendencies. I agreed and moved to Southern California. I practiced 100% safe sex. I helped out at the local GLBT center in Long Beach and assisted the editor of their monthly magazine by proofreading and editing articles, writing pieces of my own, and assisting him in procuring advertising to support its publication.

About three months later, at the age of 19 and approximately five months after the rape, I tested positive for HIV. I knew who had infected me with this most unwelcome and unexpected house-guest. I knew that a legal battle against the rapist could last for 3-5 years. For me it would have been more stressful than helpful. I buried the idea of revenge. When I told the man with whom I was living about the test results, he indicated I wasn't welcome any longer. If he were to test positive, he'd lose his commission. I was on my own in a strange city by sundown of that day. What I really wanted and probably needed was a long hug, a friend on whose shoulder I could cry and words of encouragement and wisdom beyond my years.

Over the last couple of decades I have worked as an HIV educator for young people to help them protect themselves from a similar fate. I began my work by starting an HIV/AIDS education and support group for teens with HIV. It was well-attended for quite a while and was a wonderful experience where I made several long-lasting friendships. I began to receive requests to teach HIV basics to high school peer educators. I also began to discuss such issues as: safer sex, fear of dating, self-loathing for perceived sexual missteps and how to assist a classmate who tested HIV positive. I enjoyed working with others of my own age group and providing a unique look at the face of HIV/AIDS. People were surprised that I looked as healthy as I did. I worked with Magic Johnson on his Youth and HIV video and was a panelist on a national Fox Network program dealing with HIV issues.

Shortly after being diagnosed with AIDS in 1993, I trained for and spent two years working part time on the Southern California HIV/AIDS Hotline as a listener/counselor. I enjoyed the variety of ages I met

in that position because I was getting older. We provided referrals for all types of issues surrounding HIV/AIDS needs: lists of doctors, possible mental health providers and basic facts as requested. Occasionally, we had a crisis/suicide call. This need required a fast mind, a quick/light wit and the ability to sort out the flood of emotion and information being thrown our way. We were required to bring our supervisor to the telephone to listen for supervision and back up. I was blessed to not have any unfortunate outcomes.

Those calls were a natural segue into my next volunteer position as counselor on Los Angeles' suicide intervention hotline. I took the 10-week training and was able to fit into the role with an ease that surprised me. I enjoyed this new chance to help others. Four months into my volunteerism at the hotline, I was asked if I would join the paid staff as a part-time shift supervisor/trainer. I worked in this capacity until I was too ill to do so.

Through the years I tried all the available HIV medications and found their side effects were worse than the effects of the virus itself. From one, I ended up with the severe nerve damage in my hands and feet known as peripheral neuropathy. My feet and hands feel like they are perennially asleep with tingling, burning and numbness. The symptoms are worse in the cold, humidity or rapidly dropping temperatures. Another drug gave me a fatty tumor on my back the size of a giant grapefruit and a rapidly enlarging stomach known as "protease paunch" or "lipodystrophy" (an uneven and uncommon distribution of body fat leaving the patient/person with a big tummy and/or a fatty tumor AKA a "buffalo hump.") In exactly 90 days I gained an unbelievable 90 lbs. I am amazed at how difficult it is to drop the weight. It took the pharmaceutical company more than eleven months to acknowledge these side effects.

At age thirty three I developed avascular necrosis (AVN), a condition that can be caused by several things; HIV, anti-retrovirals or long-term steroid therapy. All of these were factors in my healthcare. In AVN, blood-flow to a joint is cut off, the bone dies and the joint shatters. I had it replaced. Then, like a game of dominoes, the same problem affected a major change in a total of five joints; knees, hips, and one shoulder.

I have spent at least 13 of my 17 years with HIV trying to locate someone who will work WITH me in my healthcare. I am exhausted by my efforts to fight the control issues that many physicians feel compelled to inflict upon my care. In more cases than not, I have discovered that doctors feel THEY are the experts and forget that I have the front-row seat to my health and body. I prefer two-way communication: eye contact, listening instead of

just hearing, someone who will make sure they understand what I am saying is the problem.

I was living with someone when the paunch/buffalo hump problem surfaced. Even with my own difficulties I realized that his mix of physical and mental health issues were not healthy for our relationship. I tried to stick by him but he responded with a medication overdose. I called 911. He was taken into a nearby psychiatric facility to detox for two days.

I began a friendship based e-mail correspondence with a good and decent guy in Massachusetts. Kevin and I talked almost every day for about 4 months. He suggested I visit. I flew from Los Angeles to Massachusetts. When I arrived I realized I had fallen in love at first sight. After this visit we made arrangements for me to move east. Five weeks later, I boxed up what I could afford to mail and packed my bags. At this writing Kevin and I have been together for five and a half years. In these years I have had the worst physical problems resulting in the worst strain on my mental health that I have ever needed to handle. I am amazingly blessed. In spite of the physical pain, I've felt renewed daily by the care, love, nurture and communication I experience with Kevin. He is always concerned about my well-being. He is a true equal who does not need to control who I am or what I feel.

In the last year I have begun a Medical Office Certificate program that will give me the practical knowledge and skills to re-enter the work-place, limitations aside. I find the classes to be challenging and exhausting but well worth my efforts. When I finish the program next may, I will be proficient in Medical Transcription, Medical Coding and Billing, Medical Terminology, Medical Secretarial Procedures and in all aspects of Microsoft Word.

Kevin, Mowgli, the kitty, and I plan to relocate to Florida in July of next year. The New England winters exacerbate my neuropathy and the pain in my artificial joints. They are plastic and titanium which gets cold and stays that way. Kevin's mother lives in Ocala, Florida and he would like to be near her to provide some supports for her.

My spiritual life has been refreshed by the acceptance and love Kevin and I find in a local Congregational Church. I work in the Christian education program for the middle school-age youth. Kevin sings in the choir with his heavenly voice. I have rediscovered Christ; a gentle, loving, compassionate, and Holy companion whose words are informing my life and destiny like never before. It's such a blessing to share the love of Christ with someone as Christian as my Kevin. It is important to me that along with other aspects of our relationship, we are connected by the unifying love of Jesus

Christ.

I think everything I've been through is actually training me to adeptly serve the human community. Sure, I'd love to have a much less complicated and difficult past to remember. Job also went through loss and horrendous difficulty, but he remained close to God, and I am back in touch with Him. That's a wonderful feeling for me.

I think that God has given me a great gift in having AIDS; allowing me to remain humble yet fiercely determined. I read the book of Proverbs for support. I remember the text in the twenty fifth verse of chapter three: "Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught." My struggles are those of common humanity. I try to deal with them in uncommon ways.



Kinship News...

my life. I haven't registered till now, but have been reading your newsletters for years. I have also been on the USA Kinship site frequently, but the biggest help was Carrol Grady's website, "someone to talk to". I have no way of expressing my profound thanks and gratitude to her for what I have learned there over the last 2 or 3 years of my deepest agony. The section on letters from people - the letter "My World" by "Mark" still brings me to tears every time I read it. It is my story and there are oceans of emotion behind that and my story as well.

Continued on page 15...

Arlene Taylor is a long time friend of Kinship who has also been a Kampmeeting speaker. Most of us have experienced a variety of losses: family, church, job, friends, culture as we know it, pets, health. As we begin this new year of opportunities, we have decided to offer a two part series to help us understand better how to rebuild our lives.

To Grieve Is to Heal

Arlene Taylor PhD
California, USA

Grief is a natural response to loss. It can be defined simply as intense emotional suffering related to misfortune, injury, or evil of any type. It can also be described as conflicting feelings that are experienced following any major change to a familiar state of affairs. Unresolved loss or unhealed grief can accumulate and can impact the intensity of one's reaction to a present experience of loss.

Grief recovery is the process of learning to feel better and to achieve a condition of balance following any type of loss. For some, grief recovery means returning to a previously experienced state of soundness and balance; for others, it means attaining a state of soundness and balance that they may not have experienced before. It involves grieving the loss and healing the emotional pain. Just as human beings can recover from the pain of surgery and feel better as the incision heals, or recover from a broken bone and feel better as the bone knits together, so you can recover from a loss and feel better as you move through the grieving process and heal from the emotional pain.

There can be a vast difference between the grieving process useful in preparation for one's

own death and grief recovery that is effective for the survivors of loss. The Kubler-Ross work has been landmark in helping individuals prepare to die with dignity. The Grief Recovery Pyramid Model, on the other hand, is designed to help survivors move through grief recovery successfully, even gracefully.

Loss

According to Webster's Dictionary loss is the experiencing of losing something. It is often interpreted too narrowly, however. It could involve the loss of a loved one in death or divorce, displacement due to a natural disaster such an earthquake, a mastectomy or the amputation of a limb, a failing in some sensory perception (e.g., sight or hearing), a hoped-for event that does not materialize, the diminishment of perceived options (e.g., inability to follow a certain career path), or the loss of specific types of freedoms. Defining loss more globally reinforces the need for effective grief recovery. Unfortunately, many are unprepared to deal with loss effectively.

In general, behavioral patterns related to loss and grief recovery are learned, often in one's family-of-origin. These patterns reflect role modeling of caregivers, personal experience, cultural conditioning, verbal and nonverbal instructions (e.g., religion, politics), and expectations, to name just a few. Learning more effective behaviors can increase one's likelihood of recovering successfully from loss and freeing up vital energy. Becoming empowered to deal more effectively with your own losses increases the probability of your being better equipped to

offer encouragement and affirmation to others during their episodes of loss and grief recovery.

To be continued in the February 2007 issue of theConnection.

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"Hope" is the thing with feathers
– That perches in the soul – And
sings the tune without the words
– And never stops at all.
–*Emily Dickenson*

Kinship News...

Europe - Ruud Kieboom

Save a place!!! European Kinship Meeting 6 will be held near Paris from September 7-September 10. Afterwards we are planning a week's holiday in France. For more information you can contact me at kinship@xs4all.nl.

US Region 1 - Catherine Taylor

We had a very nice meeting with Samuel, Andrew and one year old Warren, who is quite entertaining. After dinner a group of us went to the Boston Gay Men's Chorus holiday concert.

January 13, we will be meeting in New York City. We begin our time worshipping with the SDA Forum congregation at 10AM on 126th Street. After lunch we're planning a short discussion of Kinship activities, some planning about what you would like to do for the next year and then a surprise adventure. For directions, please feel free to contact Bob at Rbouch9595@aol.com

US Region 2 - Yolanda Elliott

Whew, we've had a very busy holiday season. In January you

connection ▼

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

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

The Connection is published by Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Principal office: P.O. Box 49373, Sarasota, FL 34230-6375, 886-732-5677. Submissions are welcome and may be directed to the editor at connectioneditor@sdakinship.org or mailed to the principle office address above. Include your name as you want it published, address and telephone number. If an item is to be acknowledged or returned please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Some Connection contributors have chosen to remain anonymous or use pseudonyms.

The Connection reserves the right to edit manuscripts for length, syntax, grammar, and clarity.

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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.

are most welcome to join us for Friday vespers on January 19th. For more information about the monthly socials, feel free to contact me at yselliott@aol.com

Region 3 - Jon Roberts

In 2007 I would like to continue to move Kinship Southeast (Region 3) to become a region that is known for its togetherness. Right now I am planning vespers and then I would like us to continue on with an event every other month. In 2008 we would like to offer a weekend retreat.

Jacob reports that he has a monthly meeting planned for the Out & Christian Group in South Florida. He is working on getting used to the fact that sometimes there are large

turnouts and sometimes there are small ones. "I still hope to continue advertising the meetings...I have also spoken to Care Resources, a non-profit organization that cares for people with HIV/AIDS in the community in regards to holding support groups in their building. This support group will particularly deal with those confused with religion and sexuality. They are very supportive of the Out & Christian group that is being held in the community." Jacob would like information about any key glbti publications that would accept free ads. The group is opened to people of all faiths, even though it is catered especially for the SDA crowd.

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A Look Back: 2006

