

connection

The Journal of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. September 2007 Vol. 31 No. 5



Welcome to our Kampmeeting Issue!!

We gathered from at least six continents and many personal histories to arrive in San Francisco for a remarkable week of workshops, worship and communion with each other. There is, as always, no way that we can share with you all of the events or interactions. Here are samples of some of the talks and of course as many pictures as we could fit in. We'll continue with the pictures for the next few issues...

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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, PO Box 69, Tillamook, Oregon 97141, 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.

When Jerusalem Rejects You

Chris Oberg

Jesus said to his disciples “Go find a donkey”. They find it just where He said it would be and tell the caretaker “Our Lord has need of it”. This was not just any donkey. It was one that had not been ridden yet. The disciples cover the little one with their coats, bring it to the pathway, find branches and throw them down for the people. Jesus gets on the donkey and they have a Messiah parade. Jerusalem has seen these kinds of parades before but this is Jesus’ turn. Roman guards are posted. There are pilgrims in the city; a huge crowd. There have been others that try to come in and take over the city. The guard is watching for this; someone wandering in on a donkey and then anointed to be leader. But this is a kingdom of another kind. Jesus is riding on a donkey. Jesus has chosen a tiny work animal. What kind of king does this? How will an army of peasants take on Rome with all their military power?

When Zechariah imagines this parade, he thinks of someone with swords and horses. It is a very different group that wanders through town singing “Hosanna, blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord”. When the parade is over Jesus goes to the temple, looks around then goes to Bethany because it is late in the day. The parade is over. What was that about? Aren’t you supposed to post guards? Leave a banner behind saying that Jesus is in charge and we should all bow down and honor him. This action is like buying a new car and never driving it. Why would He have a parade, walk to the temple and leave? This is off script; any kind of script. This is the unexpected. The more we study, the more we will learn that Jesus works off script.

Conventional wisdom says he should have secured the temple. But the next morning, he gets up, is hungry and goes to get fruit. The fig tree is barren. He says “May no one ever eat from you again”. Jesus is making a well considered pronouncement. Fig trees are a metaphor for peace and prosperity. Being cursed is a sign that there is something on which to pass judgment. Jesus goes to the temple and overturns the tables of the

money changers. “My house will be called a house of prayer for all people but you have made it a den of robbers. You have taken the center of our universe and brought evil here.” It is time to take care of the place of worship.

Jesus is offended at the priests and the money changers. The people usually could not bring their own animals over distances to the temple to sacrifice. The priests of the temple would not accept the coin of the realm. Worshipers had to go to the money changer and then take the temple currency to the priest to purchase the sacrifice. Here’s the catch. The priest decides what you will purchase by how sinful he thinks you are. Look out if you are female, poor, a widow. You will be given a higher cost to go to God. The sicker a person is, the more the temple charges for their offering. The religious center of the nation becomes wealthy on the backs of the oppressed.

I think when Jesus comes into the temple he is saying “What have you done with God? I can’t see Him here in this temple.” Sometimes religious people become deranged. It’s hard to find God when bad Christians happen to good people. Bad worshippers happen to very good people when the structure that is supposed to represent God becomes more oppressive than anywhere else in society.

The theme of Kampmeeting is “Celebrating a Family of Gifts”. What happens when Jerusalem does not want your gifts? What happens when the church doesn’t want the gifts we have been given? My husband would say that his gift is science. When he was a kid, his dad lost his thumb. Kirby loved to play with his father’s stub and wanted to find a way to make it grow back. He learned that salamanders can grow their legs back. He wanted to look into science and see how he could make a difference for people. But he believes that sometimes the church doesn’t want him to ask some of the questions he asks. How should we handle that reaction?

Kirby deals with genes that are called hox genes. They are regulators of development. They transform one body part into another. Scientists have found that hox genes are not just in fruit flies but in other species and in humans. If you take a hox gene that is associated with the leg and put it into the antenna, the fruit fly will grow legs on his antenna. Kirby's dad is now eighty three years old and says if Kirby doesn't figure this out, he's not going to wait much longer. Scientists took the gene that makes an eye in a mouse and put it on the fruit fly down by his leg. Kirby never thought he shouldn't ask the question of what would happen. It never occurred to him that he should not be interested in what the mouse or the fruit fly might do. To paraphrase the great actor Thumper, "If Kirby can't study something nice, then we shouldn't study anything at all." Loma Linda University expects its scientists to ask questions but Kirby is married to a pastor and for him to ask some questions could hurt my job. Take the mouse gene for the eye, put it in the leg and we actually make eyes on the leg of a fly that have been induced by a mouse gene. This is incredible. I don't know what it tells us but Kirby still wants to ask the question.

This is a small example that tells us that if we want to ask a question that the church does not want answered, we are letting our religious organization know that they may not have all the power they think they have. We can all learn and change. There is always more up ahead. We find this when we acknowledge our gifts.

When Jesus was leaving the temple, the disciples noticed that the fig tree He cursed withered. "Have faith in God...if anyone says for this mountain to go throw itself into the sea, it will happen." The story shows that there really was evil in Jerusalem. That evil had to die to make a place where God's agenda could be elevated. Jesus had to cast out the problem so people could have faith in God. We don't say Hosanna to people, temples or church boards. We say Hosanna to God. Have faith in God, not in the temple. That is the invitation from Jesus. Don't place your faith in institutions but in the One who saves us. It's a kingdom of a different kind.

You have sometimes been disconnected from the Good News of God. I am sorry. When bad Christians happen to good people like you; they have so wounded many of you that you have turned from God. Have faith in God. He did not do this to you. He did



not assess the penalty like the temple priest. Some of us are in positions to confront the status quo. We need to walk right into power and say "This is not of God". That is the grave danger of understanding Jesus as our teacher. It has its own risks. Sacred ground sometimes turns on us. Jesus gives us the challenge to be committed enough to have faith only in the God we will be celebrating in heaven.

I was feeling the call to be a pastor when the head elder of my church stood up during services and said in prayer that we knew that God would bring us the perfect man. I am chromosomally challenged. I have come out as a pastor. Ten years ago I preached for the first time. I ran into the pastor of one of Houston's black churches in a parking lot. He said to me "The Spirit told me to ask you to preach in my church." That kind of statement makes me very nervous. The Spirit hadn't told me to preach anywhere. I replied that I didn't speak much. He said "That's all right. The Spirit told me to ask you". I put my arm next to his and said "Have you ever had a white girl preach at the Hebron Seventh Day Adventist Church?" and went home to prepare what I was going to say.

On that auspicious Sabbath he stood up and said, as only a black pastor can, "Sister Oberg is here to

preach". "Yes Sir!!" came the response. "She has come here because she is a prophet"... "Amen" ... "Let this woman speak to you" ... "Amen" ... "Let this woman speak to you!" ... "Amen!" ... "Let this woman speak to you!!!" ... "Amen!!!"

I got up and spoke for twenty five minutes. It was probably the shortest sermon in the history of a black church.

The Pastor got back up. "Sister Oberg has just preached to us!!!" ... "AMEN!!!" ... "You have heard the word of the Lord!!!" ... "Amen" ... "A prophet has been here today!" ... "Amen!!!"

Sometimes people have to stand up in the middle of Jerusalem and model what God looks like. Some of you share this gift. You have to stand up for all the others. God has an agenda. "My house will be a house of prayer for ALL people". If you follow Jesus you are required to cast sin out of Jerusalem when Jerusalem rejects us.

God, bless us with Your gifts as we work in a world where others are not so welcoming. Send advocates to stir people far ahead. When we go home let us want to offer our gifts to cast out evil and make a place for others to stand. Amen.



Personal Journey Through the Clobber Texts

Karen Wetherell

It is not easy for me to talk to total strangers about my own self but I will tell my story. It has lots of Carrol Grady in it. She should know some of the ways she has helped our lives.

In June of 2000 a fellow church member showed up at my house. I told her I needed some therapy to deal with childhood experiences with my father. She agreed to see me. With that request I began a year long process of coming out. We never talked about my father.

In December of that year I went to Maryland for Christmas. At our Book and Bible house I went to the section of books on clearance.

In this stack of books was Carrol's book. I didn't know what it was about; I just added it to my stack of winter reading.

I had always been attracted to women. I thought that maybe all women were that way. I didn't want to be an abomination to God so early on I decided I couldn't be a lesbian. During this winter I realized I was personally attracted to a woman for the first time in my adult life. In January my next door neighbor stopped by my house. She told me she was switching Presbyterian congregations because they were too homophobic and would not

ordain women. She talked about what the Bible was really saying about homosexuality. I began to think "Oh my word, I might not be an abomination." I began to study the Bible on my own, using a Concordance. I realized I needed a book. I drove over to Barnes and Noble and wandered through the store, hoping I would not see anyone who knew me. I found a book that says What the Bible Really Means about Homosexuality. I covered it with another book and checked out. I put the book on my nightstand and let it sit there for months. One day, for my Sabbath Reading, I picked

up Carol Grady's book. I laid it down again and thought "Oh my word, this is about being gay. I have this book". I read the book straight through. I put it down and thought "Okay Carol, you say it's okay to be gay as long as you stay celibate." I found her website. On that website I found this book "What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality". I had that one too!! I never went to sleep. I read until six in the morning.

That night I went to a contemporary service at our church. The topic "just happened to be" Homosexuality. The speaker said what I had heard Carol say; homosexuals are fine humans as long as we don't act on our orientation. I went to him after the meeting and said "How do you handle the things that are out there that do not agree with what you just said?" I shared with him the texts I had been researching that showed the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. He told me everything I was finding in my study of the Bible was true but he was still going to preach against homosexual relationships because he had decided they were wrong.

I went home and talked to God. For one year at this point, God had been walking me through all these steps. At the same time my therapist had begun to ask me "Karen, do you think you are a lesbian?" I finally called her up on the phone and came out to her. She said "I know honey". I went over to her house and she told me that the class she had been taking the whole semester was on homosexuality. She let me read her final paper. She said the texts with

which we are clobbered were not talking about a monogamous homosexual relationship. Her last sentence said "I would rather see a healthy homosexual relationship than the dysfunctional



heterosexual relationships I see every day."

Sometime in this part of the process I came out to my husband. At first he thought my feelings might be because I felt isolated and rejected by the many hours he had worked to build his career and support our family. I told him about my adolescent relationship with the woman who had been my maid of honor at our wedding. He began to believe me. He was very sweet and very supportive. He helped me find Kinship.

I wanted to access the Kinship website and conversations but I was one of those people who was scared to death to have others know who I really was. I struggled for weeks. I didn't know this Fred Casey person. I was mad because I had to be real. Finally I got brave. After filling out the form six or seven times I sent it. Fred called me up and told me about

SDAWomen Friends. I joined that forum and got really involved with Kinship. I talked to God each step of the way. I am absolutely sure God was guiding.

Carol Grady has also been on a journey and has changed her attitude to be much more accepting. But even her original stance helped me to find her and find further Biblical research.

I came out to the senior pastor of the church where I worked. I told him to show me where I am wrong or I was going to go further on this journey. The pastor said there was nothing in the Bible that showed me where I was wrong. I did the same thing with the associate pastor. He said he had looked and looked around his office and there was nothing that said the Bible condemns monogamous homosexual relationships. I went to three ministers and all three told me I was right.

I took a week to go find Kinship members. I drove to Maryland so I could attend Yolanda's vespers and pool party weekend. I needed to know if I could live in this gay culture. I was afraid someone was going to see me and tell my mother. The night of vespers my three girls helped fix me up. Then I realized they were getting themselves ready to go somewhere. I asked them what their plans were. They looked at me in amazement and said "Mom, we're not letting you go there without support. We're coming with you! We want to make sure these people are okay." They enjoyed the service. They liked the people they met. They fell in love

with Leif. They relaxed and let me go on my own to the Sunday pool party.

I went to say hello to my mother at her office. She asked me where my husband was. She was very suspicious. "What is the matter?" "What is wrong?" She started following me out of her office into the storage area of the electrical company where she worked. "Are you and Russ having problems?" I said "Mom really, this is not the time or place". She followed me all the way out to the parking lot. I told her "I am afraid you will think less of me if I tell you what is going on." She said there was nothing I could do that would make her think less of me. I told her I was gay. She was shocked. She still does not feel comfortable with my orientation.

I believe that God loves me so much that He wants me to be truly myself. I would like for my mother to accept me. I had an excellent divorce. God gave me that. I am thankful for what I have. Maybe sometime I will have a different and closer relationship with my mother. My in-laws have stayed in touch with me. We exchange cards and letters. I saw them last year at my daughter's graduation and enjoyed spending time with them. They even gave me a gift from their house that is very very special to me. I could have cried at their thoughtfulness and am grateful for their love.

Here are the lessons I learned from What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality by Daniel Helminiak

1. We must understand the context of where, what time of

history and for whom the Biblical writers were speaking.

2. The writers of Leviticus were probably speaking of the Canaanite tradition of humiliating conquered foes by forcing them to submit sexually to their victors. This was not about loving relationships but about power.

3. Hebrew words translated "homosexuality" or that appear to be talking about homosexual acts have their root definitions in the concepts of idolatry and temple prostitution. When Paul refers to same sex sexual behaviors in his writings he also appears to be dealing with practices connected with the Greco-Roman fertility gods.

4. The sin of Sodom was being inhospitable to the two angelic strangers who came to town. Lot offers hospitality. The citizens of the city come to Lot's house and want to abuse their power like the other conquering practices of Canaan in that time.

5. The word Abomination that is used to describe some of the same sex sexual behaviors I just mentioned is the root word used for dietary restrictions. What I learned in my studies is that we cannot bring an abomination on ourselves by eating an unclean animal. The same would therefore hold true for other practices that were listed as "an abomination."

These understandings have clearly changed my life. As I deal with other people who don't understand the Biblical texts I think "This was me". I am grateful for the ways God has led me. I am hopeful for others.



Our Spiritual Gifts

Chris Glasser – Metropolitan Community Church, San Francisco, California

In *Out of Africa* Isak Dennison wrote that “Pride is faith in the idea that God had when God made us.” We of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community are claiming our place at the Lord’s table. We are claiming our faith that the Divine imprint is found in each and every one of us. Look around. Look at the Holy in each and every one of us. One of the most important things we can do is honor the sacred within one another. We can stand naked before God and not be ashamed of our bodies. With the psalmist we can see that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Our love is as strong as death. In Jesus we celebrate the resurrection of our bodies. And with the early church we celebrate that we are part of the body. God made us a part of his own body; birth, blessing, incarnation, baptism. Passion is the devotion of our faith to Godliness. Our pride and our passion are necessary to the movement that I have been a part of for thirty-five years. Passion is when a person in a wheel chair enrolls in a race and trains and finishes. Without passion the race cannot be achieved. Pride allows for the celebration of the completion of the race.

There are other forms of pride and other forms of passion. A pastor came to me with a problem. “I have always known that gay people are designed by God but I’ve been taught that pride is one of the seven deadly sins.” Pride is what caused the violence of the first murder. Pride is what also led people to build the tower of Babel so they could reach up to God’s heaven. There is a healthy pride and there is a false pride. It is false pride that is most often associated with prejudice. It is the pride of the dominant culture. The sin, if we can call it that, of marginalized people is our lack of self esteem. Our heterosexist culture needs to confess pride and prejudice. We need to confess our pride in our God and the way He created us.

Henri Nowen wrote that people can hook us in our wounds and dismiss us. His beloved spiritual community would never have accepted him as a gay man, proud of the way God created him. This dismissal broke Henri’s heart. He died on the very day his *Inner Voice of Love* was published in 1996.

We don’t talk about sexuality in the context of spirituality enough. We can take pride in the fact that we are encouraging people to think about spirituality, sexuality and community. When we are sexually spiritual we learn more about God’s tender, loving, care. We like to say at MCC San Francisco that God has no hands but our own, no feet but our own. God touches us through our bodies; through our love making. When denied the spiritual gifts of the church, we have been baptized by the love making of our spiritual fluids. Love making is another expression of God’s providence. We can recognize these as gifts from God. Pleasure is the strongest argument for the existence of God.

When we reach out to one another in shame, we hurt one another. Shame can parade around as if it were pride. The culture of the church will often keep us in a place of shame and then turn around and condemn us for our woundedness. Keeping us in a defensive posture keeps us from celebrating our pride.

Just as we cannot let the church culture set our agenda, we cannot let the queer community set our agenda either. How often do we not come out as religious in the queer community because we are afraid of being condemned? We are realizing that the struggle for human rights is the struggle for the soul of the body politic.

Those for whom the Bible is a sacred text can see the Bible as a guide for a community based on value and grace. We can see the Bible as a story of a God who belongs to everyone and Who is at everyone’s table. We are all beloved children of God. We can live as if we were all beloved children of God. The kingdom of heaven is the commonwealth of God. God’s own self will be with us. Death will be no more. Mourning, crying and pain will be with us no more. Those we recognize as saints among us are already living in the commonwealth of God. The Greek word for church is literally “The called out ones”. We are called to come out of Babel and speak as did the ones on Pentecost. On that day the walls disappeared and they were not contained in the Upper Room. Their

voice became heard. Spirit called people out of an exclusively Jewish sect and into a belief that is inclusive of all. We have witnessed the call out of bigotry and into the understanding that we are called to live as we were intended-loved children of God.

Coming out is a theme of scripture. The queer community has given this metaphor to the entire world. We can witness the children of Israel coming out of the bondage of EGYPT. We can witness God coming out of the heavenly closet through revelation. Jesus came out of the closet of the tomb at resurrection. Most of us have endured spiritual abuse at the hand of our religious communities. All forms of abuse are forms of spiritual abuse. None of us should ever be considered less than Holy. We mourn our martyrs who have been bashed. We grieve our martyrs to AIDS and cancer whose lives and health were considered expendable. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who

are cheering us along. Honor the ancestors of our movement. They are dependent on us for the fulfillment of their faith. I believe all movements of the Spirit are political and personal.

To hold on to the passion requires stamina. Stamina is what enables us to finish the race. As with Esther, “who knows but whether you have been born to such a time as this?” If we do not speak up we cannot hold our heads up high. We have to tell the powers that be who is missing at the table. We cannot neglect the promise of our faith that all will be welcome.

Passion comes from the Latin word that means suffering. It is not easy. It does not reap instant rewards. Many of the leaders of our movement are gone. But the pride and the passion they brought are present. Until the day when we are with them, we must keep the faith, keep the pride and keep the passion alive.



Kinship News and Resources

Kinship Older Adults - Virginia Reynolds

When we were growing up years ago in our sleepy Southern town, most of the adults seemed rather staid and sober. There was, however, one memorable exception: Miss Lucy, a widow lady who lived with her prim and proper sister, Clara. But Miss Lucy was full of charm and sparkle and enthusiasm. One day Miss Lucy-in her 60s asserted that she could still stand on her head. When we looked doubtful, she clamped her skirt between her knees and did so, beaming at us upside down. "Oh, Lucy," said Clara. "Do be your age!" Miss Lucy righted herself. "What sort of nonsense is that?" she asked. "How can anyone be anything but their age? The trick is to love your age. Love it when you're young and strong and foolish. Love it when you're old and wise. Love it in the middle when the challenges come and you can solve some of them, maybe most of them. If you love your age, you'll never go around wishing you were some other age. Think about that, Clara."

- Arthur Gordon

Source: *Return to Wonder*
(Broadman & Holman)

Another Kinship Older Adult web resource -
<http://www.othersheep.org/>

Despite the greater inclusion of women in the recent literature on aging, lesbians continue to remain invisible. This article presents the inquiries of two mid-life lesbian social work academics into the lives of lesbian women growing older, and the gaps revealed between the images of lesbians constructed in the public domain, and the lives of women who do not fit the mainstream or dominant images. The inquiry begins with the voices of the "experts": women who are living their mid-life years as lesbians in a society which does not "see" or image them. Whether or not this invisibility in mid-life and old age can be overcome through access to a supportive community seems open to debate. Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678.

E-mail address:
getinfo@haworth.com.

Transgender Issues – Sandra Hoffecker

During the week of June 28, 2007 The American Medical Association voted to amend its nondiscrimination policies to include transgender persons. AMA nondiscrimination policies already included sexual orientation. "Transgender patients, physicians, and medical students continue to face discrimination around the country," said Joel Ginsberg, Executive Director of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association

(GLMA). "The AMA has said it's time for this to stop."

IMRU – Ruben Lopez

IMRU? made its presence known this year at Kampmeeting by hosting one of the evening seminars. Entitled "Celebrating Your Inner Gifts," I guided the audience to embracing and accepting their gifts from God and led them in an exercise in which they wrote a letter to their inner child. Members of IMRU? then facilitated small group discussions about the letters written. Much thanks to Tobias, Brett, Jason, Ken, Adam, and Josephine for helping out. Our membership is still growing, with an approximately 140 members at this point in time.

Kinship Friends and Family – Carol Grady

During Kampmeeting Sabbath we had twenty "friends and family" attend. We had a good afternoon discussion, facilitated by John and Carolyn Wilt, on "Dealing with our Emotions."

US Region 1 – Catherine Taylor

We still have a few more "Rooms at the Inn" for our wonderful Mini Kampmeeting in Windsor, Vermont. It will take place over the weekend of November 2-4 and we've already planned a plethora of workshops, surprises, crafts, visitations and great food. If you would like to join us, please feel free to call Catherine at 802-885-6050 or write to her at katgurian@aol.com.



Good-bye Peter

Peter Mueller died of AIDS three days before Kampmeeting 2007 began. On Friday evening, we had a memorial service for him. What he wanted most as a memorial was to share this letter he wrote to his community.

Dear Friends and family,

Even as a young child I said that I would get in the last words when I died. Over the years I constructed letters, audio tapes and then videos. In the end, a simple letter will do. In the end, a simple letter will do.

Let me tell you my story...

I was born in Oshawa, Ontario to a family who loved me the best way they knew how. My Mother, Glenda would often tease me that the perfect parents for me would have been a middle aged Jewish couple waiting for the birth of the Messiah. That sounded good to me. My Father...hmmm. Let's just say the one good contribution he made to my life was a biological one. Without that contribution I would not be here. My sister Heidi loved her little brother so much, that one day she put me in her doll carriage to push me around. Of course it broke but she was always there for me.

In my pre teen years I started to discover there was something different about me. I could not put a name on it. During my teen years I realized I was gay. In the religion in which I was raised, that was just about the biggest sin possible. I think we were on the list just above axe murders. It is hard enough in our teen years to discover ourselves as sexual beings. Back then, in that environment, it was pure hell. I thought my eternal soul was on the line.

I would like to tell you that my coming out process included bravely stepping up to the plate to tell friends and family that I was gay. But no, my family found out when I was kicked out of school for the crime of my



orientation. As a confused, scared boy, trying to figure out life, I had confided in my guidance counselor. I can still remember the day my mother found out. We were both scared and confused but she insisted that she loved me. In all honesty, at the time I thought she was just saying what mothers are expected to say. But I was wrong, wrong big time. The fallout of my initial exposure was the decision to ship me off to

the United States where the church ran a center that "CURED" gay people. (You are allowed to gasp out loud here.) As part of the move I went to see my family doctor, Keith Madgwick. (Remember that name, he reenters this story in a big way) In the course of our conversation, the reason for my trip came up, Keith, who is also a Seventh Day Adventist, told me that there were other options. He thought the church could be wrong on this issue. It was because of him that I was put in touch with Seventh Day Adventist Kinship, which I saw as the church's gay group. Okay, it wasn't officially sanctioned but here was a community of people with the same faith system as me who were convinced that we are not damned to hell for how God created us. Dr. Keith also gave me some articles from one of the more fringe publications of the church where a series of articles over the big "H" word were being printed. In these pages the battle was being fought by "very smart" people with lots of initials after their names. Somehow, in my confusion I was caught in the middle. I thought these people must be wrong because the church said they were. I thought they were picking on Colin Cook and the Quest learning center. Colin was my hero. He was going to save me and literally put me on the path of the "Straight" and narrow. I fired off a very angry letter to Kinship and put them in their rightful place. I went back to my packing. Oddly enough Kinship's response, three weeks later, was the

arrival of three of the most loving and compassionate letters I ever received.

I trotted off to Reading, Pennsylvania to save my immortal soul and learn to be butch...no, no, that's not right. I trotted off to learn how to be Straight. Who knows, maybe butch would have been a side effect. One could always hope.

During my stay in PA many things happened. I was sexually abused by Colin Cook. I came to realize that the Quest Program was a scam for Colin to get sex. I was also Spiritually abused by Colin. One good thing that happened at Quest was that I met my adopted big brother, Jerry McKay. Jerry, I offer you a big hug. There have been gaps over the years when I did not see Jerry but he always came back to my life when I needed him. That's what big brothers do. Ask my mom or Jerry and they will tell the story of how he got the title of my big brother. Another good outcome of quest was that I kept in contact with Kinship and got to know its members.

I had my first romance. OK. It was all teenage and icky in some ways, but it was a genuine high-school crush/romance. We wrote letters and got to spend a weekend together in Washington D.C. I think my family is hearing this for the first time. He was an older man; of twenty four. I was sixteen. My heart fluttered like butterflies. I can still remember sitting in a movie theater watching "Mr. Mom" and holding hands in the dark. I still get weak in the knees thinking about it. (YES you can sigh a big AHHHHH, isn't that cute) Although short lived, this romance confirmed in my soul who I was.

I left Reading PA with my immortal soul still intact no thanks to Colin Cook or the Seventh Day Adventist Church. I moved to London and lived with my sister. We had a grand time. We could not afford to run the heat in the winter but when Dr. Keith came for a visit we ran around in T-shirts trying to prove to him that we

were doing fine. He froze. I had one of the best Christmases of my life that year.

When I moved back to Oshawa, Ontario I met Wil Patterson who became my husband. He was an incredible man. As fate would have it Mom began dating and then married Dr. Keith about the same time. I had to have been brave or very stupid to marry a family therapist and Wil must have been brave or stupid to marry someone twenty years his junior. I am grateful love was there in abundance. Blessings on my family. They welcomed us and wrapped us in the blanket of their love. During our years together I spent much of my time in HIV/AIDS activism; in rallies, letter writing campaigns, demonstrations, fundraising and prayer. It



was how I channeled the anger, the pain, and the sorrow from all the time spent in hospitals and AIDS hospices. Too many victims of the epidemic became untouchables and died alone and unloved. I attended too many memorials. Nothing prepared me for the day Wil came home and announced he had

just been diagnosed with AIDS. Less than two years later I held him as he took his last breath. Through it all, my family loved us. They moved heaven and earth to give us the best possible care and support.

Not too many years after Wil's death, I got my own diagnosis. At the time I was living in Greenfield, Massachusetts. Catherine Taylor, as you read this, know that I will meet you at the nudist section of the Sea of Glass. I will also make sure they have plenty of broccoli on the menu. You all can ask Catherine and Jerry about "Kamp Broccoli."

Being a Canadian in the US did not make sense now that AIDS was part of my life. I headed north. I thought I would be dead in two years. In the middle of my personal grief I met Keith Duncan. We spent twelve years together. Much of that time was spent living in a very rural part of Ontario caring for a tree farm in a

house with no running water and doing things only we could think were paradise. My Mom tells a less glamorous version of the story. When Keith's health challenges became too great we moved to Peterborough. That move brought a lot of good to both of our lives. It was too soon before I held Keith close as he pass from this world. Nobody should have to lose two life partners to a horrible disease! Somebody make it stop!

That is my story. I am Peter Frederick Mueller, a proud gay man, creation of God, child of the universe, son of Glenda and Keith, brother to Hedi, brother-in-law to Susan, proud husband of Wil Patterson, proud life partner of Keith Duncan. I lived and breathed. I loved and laughed the best way I knew. I hugged and was held. I faced my challenges and I died of AIDS without shame.

Mom I honestly did not believe you the day you stood in tears after finding out I was gay and told me you loved me. You spent your lifetime proving it. I hope you know I loved you back just as much. Keith/ Dad, A

long time ago I heard a saying that a parent's job is the give their child both roots and wings. When you told me all those years ago that I had options in my life, you gave me wings. Thank you! Later you gave me roots and the stability of knowing you would always be there for me.

Heidi, there are no words. Thank you for always being there. Thank you for being willing to jump on a plane and fly in when I needed you most. Stop working so hard and live a little. I am so proud of all you have done. Susan, I could not have picked a better partner for my sister. You have been a wonderful addition to our crazy little family. Thank you for the way you love and care for Heidi. I used to think it was my job but you do it better than I could. To my friends and family, in my short time on earth I have seen and felt the power of love. I have seen people die from lack of it. I have seen people whose bodies should have been dead live on because of it. I have one last thing to say to you. Love each other, the best way you can. ▼

Aloha Bob

In a very different kind of farewell, we would like to say thank you to Bob Bouchard who has been Kinship's President through twelve of our twenty five years. He has also been Connection editor, regional coordinator and gentle supporter of many people and parts of our community. He and his partner Vince live with Sam the cat in San Diego. We wanted to share a bit of his story.

I was born in New York City. One parent was Catholic, one was Lutheran. No one went to church. My maternal grandmother got involved with the Seventh Day Adventists at a time when she

needed a ride to church. My mother took my sister and I with her when she took her mother. Since my grandmother was a German speaker we went to the German SDA church. There was English speaking Sabbath School for the children. The services were in German. I didn't get much out of them. I am not sure I would have considered myself an Adventist except that the church volunteered to pay my way to seventh and eighth grade as well as academy. This was a very giving church. Because of immigration patterns there were not many children and they wanted to

support my church based education.

With this background I never had the oppression experienced by some children who were raised by





Adventists. Neither parent cared about the edges of the Sabbath. I would sometimes watch *Rawhide* on Friday night. I went to Greater New York Academy; a day school. I did not have some of the restrictive things that made children rebellious. They didn't provide meals. We went to the local grocery store and got a sandwich. There were no curfews.

I knew I was gay or at least different when I was somewhere between the ages of seven and nine. I didn't know what it meant to my life. I met my first boyfriend as I was driving onto the campus of Andrews University. This was my first emotional attachment to someone who reciprocated. I couldn't deal with it at the time. I basically pulled away from the relationship and spent the next four years endeavoring not to act on my attractions. I did not want to be tagged as "that little gay boy". During that period I got great grades and knew a lot of gay friends.

During my graduate year at Andrews I met another person.

This was my second great emotional upheaval. It ended in the same way but this time the shoe was on another foot. He left because he could not deal with being gay. I went to Taiwan and did a year of teaching. I was probably heading toward a career teaching in the Adventist school system but as a result of the second relationship I learned I needed to act on my orientation. I believed my orientation would make it impossible for me to work inside Seventh Day Adventist structures. I went off to law school because it gave me more options outside the church. I finished law school in 1979 and joined Kinship in 1980. I was in a nine year relationship with Charlie from 1978 to 1987.

Both my mother and my sister were schizophrenic. The results of their illness clearly had a formative impact on who I became. Things outside the home became my stability. When I went back to New York to go to law school I began to grow a family. Mark, Ronnie and Ira along with Vince are my immediate family. My father, mother and sister are gone so I have created a family that has lasted for decades. I have spent all my holidays with these people. I have made my major life transitions with these people.

Ron Lawson, who I got to know through the Adventist Forum, called me up and told me that there was going to be a meeting with representatives of the General Conference. I could not go because my mother was being hospitalized. In September 1980 I was able to go to an organizing

meeting for Kinship in San Francisco and got involved. The first year I was Region 1 coordinator. The second year I became Connection editor. The Connection then was very basic. There were no pictures. I used a justifying typewriter. I pressed type for the headlines so the words on the headline would not look all jangled. We had eight to twelve pages of eight and a half by eleven sheets folded in the middle. The next year, 1982, the first president of Kinship resigned and I was elected president of the organization until 1988.

Those six years were years of strong passion. There were a lot of people in pain. In the church and in their own lives, there was pain. The good news was that they brought a lot of caring and passion to Kinship. The bad news was that the high emotions made it difficult to resolve problems diplomatically. In those years we had major growth with the relationship between the men and the women. Financially we were hand to mouth for all of my first term as president but we never lacked for funds. At every board meeting we



would pass the hat to make sure that the Connection could go out. The amount of tears that were expended in healing and in growing was huge. I was fascinated by the real conversations with high level church officials. This ultimately did not change the official church position on GLBTI issues. The church filed suit to have us not use the term SDA in our name. We got pro bono legal assistance from a now defunct GLB legal association. We won the suit.

The discussions about using inclusive language left me being the person doing one on one talks with members who were feeling strongly about the issue. We would work together to ascertain the reasons and ways of addressing strong reactions. There was a fair amount of heat; of running outside and slamming doors. At one Kampmeeting, we had a particularly difficult time what road to take in terms of using hymnals. People did not want to change the words of Martin Luther. Others wanted his language to become more inclusive. We were trying to bring a different viewing to what words mean. Sometimes it was intense and draining for me to deal with people who were angry. I knew it was something that I learned I could do. Ultimately we had to come to agreement. I knew if we could come to agreements...and we did on most issues...we could grow.

I have been amazed that Kinship has always gotten what it needed. When we needed a place to have a board meeting, someone in our group would volunteer. More often than not, we would be served home cooked gourmet food. When we needed money for pamphlets to go to teachers, someone would donate it.

I got involved with an LGBT alliance and got connected to others who were leaders in similar organizations. I learned from them. The AIDS crisis was beginning. It was heart rending for me that many people who were pillars of the organization and whom I loved died. Until the mid nineties, every Kampmeeting was filled with remembrances. I believe that the AIDS crisis brought the men and women together in ways that might not have happened because some things that we might have thought were important, became less important. This was about helping people who were going to die. It changed our perspectives. How do we help people who needed cash infusions? These were causes that we could not ignore. When we look at some of the people who were key players; Vern, Errol Chamness who was treasurer until he couldn't be, Bernie Ochoa. There are no replacements for these men. A lot of these people were my family. I prayed with them and held them. Dealing with Colin Cook, the Quest Center, his attitude that if you pray enough God will make you straight and Colin's abuses was another major issue that unified us.

It seems that there was great emotion in the spiritual experience. We would do those big circle sings and go on for hours. Sometimes people found the prayers emotionally transforming and exhausting. We would leave Kampmeeting satisfied but drained. The first tenure was clearly about establishing the organization and focusing on us, the

connection

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LGBT people in the church and in the US. We were about letting the world know who we were and what we are about. Everything was being done for the first time.

During my second tenure as president the focus has been ways to increase the international perspective and working more with the outer ring of parents and friends of GLBTI Kinship members. We've begun to support organizations like Heartstrong. We've touched hundreds, if not thousands, of people. Kinship is much better known. The internet has allowed people to find us on a variety of search engines. I am older. I do think there are many similarities. We have always been gifted with people who are willing to jump in and do the work. I have always believed that we can get the money. It is the human energy that decides which of the various great ideas we are able to pursue. I believe that was true in the 1980s and I believe it is true now. Clergy know more about us. The world and the church have changed. There is more consciousness about LGBTI issues that there was in the '80s.

Being part of Kinship has changed me. Kinship has given me a cause and a family. There are other things I do in my life that I am certainly glad I do but I don't think they have the potential to change lives. My involvement with Kinship has given me the opportunity to think my life makes a difference to a large community and to individuals. Kinship has helped me understand my unique gifts that help this organization and community. When my job was boring my life interest levels were filled by Kinship.

I am glad that Kinship as an organization is here for people when they need us. Sometimes people have found us, not been ready, and left. Often they have come back ten years later. Sometimes people come here and then move on. I ask if people's lives are better because we have been here. It is not about the organization as a structure. It is about meeting the needs. If there was ever not a need for Kinship I would be the first one to declare victory and go on to other things in life. Still now, I am glad we are here. I am glad to be a part of this community. ▼

