

# connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 39, No. 7, October 2015



*A re you a real lesbian?*

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## WHO WE ARE...

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

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

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



PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA

or visit Kinship's website [www.sdakinship.org/resources](http://www.sdakinship.org/resources) for information about

- Find a Gay Friendly Church
- *Homosexuality: Can We Talk About It?*
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## SUPPORT KINSHIP

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

## RESOURCES

- [www.someone-to-talk-to.net](http://www.someone-to-talk-to.net)
  - [www.buildingsafeplaces.org](http://www.buildingsafeplaces.org)
  - [www.itgetsbetterforadventists.org](http://www.itgetsbetterforadventists.org)
  - [www.sgamovie.com](http://www.sgamovie.com)
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- ... and more



## From the Editor

Do we, who are so used to the world of movies, sometimes forget how personal a film can be? As we look at edited and polished reels do we think we have come to know the people on and behind the screen? Do we see or remember the effort, care, commitment, and sacrifice that go into documentaries like *Seventh-Gay Adventists*?



The first time I met Stephen and Daneen they were holding a very young baby and wondering if it would be possible to make a movie about LGBTI folks with Adventist backgrounds. Novel thought. Wonder who would look at it? Wonder who would want to be part of it? How on earth do you fund something like this? Who would contribute? Looking back I wonder how they managed to listen so carefully to the hundreds of story hours we shared. What was it like for them to give up their home and travel the United States in a little trailer with a camera and an almost toddler? What's it like to give up the notion of "a real job" so you can spend hundreds of hours cutting takes in the back room of a tiny apartment? What's it like to think it's normal to drive a car with 236,000 miles on it? What's it like to give up the notion of a family you had planned because the film became the second and consuming "child"? Neither Stephen nor Daneen talk much about this. They've been too focused on us and on the people who opened their eyes and their hearts to this work of love.

After many years they are finally expanding their family in a more traditional way—they have birthed a second human child (Lucy Samantha was born on September 30). They still live on faith and miracles. Given all the tangible ways they have loved us, I wonder if you would like to take this time of transition to say "Thank you" or "I love you" to these remarkable people. If you want to write a note of appreciation you can reach them at [daneen@daneenakers.com](mailto:daneen@daneenakers.com). If you pray, I know they will appreciate your care. Daneen and Stephen's focus has almost never been on themselves so I know they would join me in telling you, no matter how you respond, take good care of yourselves, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



# A Sabbath for Homosexuals: An Oxymoron or a Blessing?



Oliver Sacks, "In memoriam" (1933-2015)

By Hans Gutierrez

*For this is what the LORD says: "To the 'homosexuals' (eunuchs) who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant, to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off." Isaiah 56: 4, 5.*

The 14<sup>th</sup> annual European Kinship Meeting (EKM) took place on August 27-31, 2015, in the charming and breezy city of Florence, Italy. It was well-organized by Ruud Kieboom and Lisa Verona, and LGBT Adventists from all over Europe met to share their experiences and to encourage each other in their Christian living. Under the general title of "This Church is Our Church, is Your Church, is Mine," led by an emphatic Italian pastor, the group tried to understand and discover the sense and need of healthy religious roots and belonging. Two dimensions were kept closely in mind during the entire weekend.

First, there is the enormous value of the real, concrete life of these Adventists—sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of us all—who attend the same Sabbath school meetings, sing the same hymns, and read the same Bible; Adventists who are deeply attached to the same hope in Christ's second coming. This heterogeneous and existentially rich group, here in Europe or elsewhere, doesn't represent a problem or a risk for Adventism, as some still believe, but rather a resource and an opportunity to understand and re-articulate the real priorities in our church. Because Ad-

ventism is a religious community very much attached to its high ideals and standards, it becomes easy for Adventists to forget that those values are emptied of meaning if we isolate them from the actual life and experience of the people they are supposed to inform and orient. Real people are not ancillary realities or entities subservient to ideals. Rather they help correct, reshape, and—above all—distinguish which ideals are ideological and dehumanizing and which are life-promoting and thus truly binding.

The concrete life of people can't be reduced to just an application of our ideals. It must become the assessment-place of our cherished high ideals. This happens in healthy families and must also happen in our Adventist community. Ideals can help us but may also deeply damage us. Ideals are not God and, therefore, are not absolutes in themselves but need to be continually assessed and reoriented. The best way to do this is by confronting them with the real lives of people. That is what LGBT Adventists can really represent for us. A mercy, a gift, a human space to check the validity and real force of our ideals. We can't give them up. We would become poorer and hollowed, merely methodological Adventists without dimensions of hope and laughter.

A reduction to religious machines, trying to make others as predictable as ourselves.

Second, we have used the Bible to keep us blindly attached to our unduly absolutized ideals. This attitude is visible in the rule-based understanding of the Sabbath, the second coming, vegetarianism, or other lifestyle issues. But we can't rescue and renew these fundamental Adventist experiences if we keep maintaining the same rigid and monolithic principle-based hermeneutics. For this reason our typical "exclusive principle-based" hermeneutic must become an "inclusive poetic-narrative hermeneutic" that allows us to privilege plurality and complexity instead of univocal homogeneity. Our exclusivist hermeneutic has led us to deform our understanding of the Sabbath. We have been attentive to all the passages which are predominantly rule-based and therefore exclusivist. But the Bible also has strong inclusive Sabbath-related verses such as the one quoted at the top of this essay. In reality both perspectives belong to the Bible, the inclusive and the exclusive. But we need to modify and update our massively exclusive Sabbath hermeneutic, introducing important corrections. And the most important corrective is to allow inclusive texts their rightful dominance. This is just what Jesus himself taught us in the Gospel: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).



This is what the group gathered in Florence was debating, without fully realizing it, after the opening Friday evening meeting, in the nice but still impersonal Hotel "Stibbert." A seemingly practical decision: where to go to church Sabbath morning. But the discussion also implied an important theological positioning. We decided to go to the Central Adventist Church in Florence because that was the place where we felt the most sense of belonging. During the service the leading elder welcomed the Kinship group; and the Italian Adventist University, "Villa Aurora," offered its beautiful garden to have the afternoon Sabbath meeting, thus

showing an inclusive Sabbath hermeneutic.



This same inclusive hermeneutic caught our attention later that afternoon by the corporative reading of Oliver Sacks' last short narrative, "Sabbath," that simultaneously had appeared some days before in the *New York Times* and in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*. ([http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/opinion/sunday/oliver-sacks-sabbath.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/opinion/sunday/oliver-sacks-sabbath.html?_r=0)) Sacks' narrative indirectly describes three important conditions about religion and the Sabbath:

- 1) The bewildering ambivalence of religion—every religion. Religions can both help and damage. We've known that since...forever. But usually we interpret this fact in a convenient way, believing that *wrong* religions do really damage but not the *true* ones (i.e., ours). Sacks' point, however, is that "true religions" are the ones which damage the *most*. His own very orthodox English Jewish community gave him an incredibly positive sense of belonging but simultaneously a chronic and incurable sense of rejection when, on one Sabbath day, he confessed his homosexuality to his father. When his mother also learned this she screamed at him, saying: "*You are an abomination. I wish you had never been born.*"
- 2) Religions survive more for the relations they are able to build and care for than the doctrinal apparatus they proudly exhibit and defend. This is not a matter of whether the religion is conservative or liberal. Sacks implicitly welcomes the positive figure of his religiously orthodox cousin Robert John Aumann, winner of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Economics for his work on Game Theory. He praises the deep religious commitment that pushed Aumann to say he would have renounced the Nobel Prize if had he been invited to go to Stockholm on a Sabbath. But Aumann's religious commitment was never divorced from a deep human warmth, tenderness, and inclusiveness. So much so that, in his last visit to Jerusa-



lem, Sacks and his lover Billy were invited by Aumann to join him and his family at their opening Sabbath meal.

- 3) Religions are not true because they believe correctly in what God, reality, or human existence is. All religious ideas are just *approximate* knowledge. For this reason both true and false religions keep making mistakes. Their truth-validity resides instead in their capacity to confess, repent, and reorient themselves in favor of people's well-being and renewal. The Jewish community that had excluded him, after 60-65 years, now welcomed him back and accepted him and his partner Billy without understanding. Sacks says of this moment: *"The peace of the Sabbath, of a stopped world, a time outside time, was palpable, infused everything."* And, sometime after his visit to Jerusalem—lying in his bed, beaten by irreversible metastatic cancer—Sacks still feels himself coddled like a baby by the memory of his inclusive and welcoming Jewish family and the Sabbath blessing they succeeded in transmitting to him. That blessed memory gives him peace and trust when he writes: *"I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest."*



In our last meeting with the Kinship European group, near the Ponte Vecchio in Florence's magic Oltrarno quarter, we were eating a delicious pizza and still remembering the healing touch of Sacks' narrative on the Sabbath when we got the news that he had passed away that same day.

Sixty years had passed until his orthodox Jewish family and community that rejected him finally welcomed him back again—and still without understanding. But they did. Will we be able to do the same?

How many Bryan, Carlos, John, David, Linda, Klaus, Ulrich, Marjorie, Gianni, and Carmen Adventists need to pass away, isolated and abandoned, without having been included in our church's Sabbaths? Oliver Sacks was blessed and, with timid and wavering hope, I dare to trust it will also be true for my children, in the community where they were born.



*Hanz Gutierrez is a Peruvian theologian, philosopher and physician. Currently he is Chair of the Systematic Theology Department at the Italian Adventist Theological Faculty of "Villa Aurora" and director of the CECSUR (Cultural Center for Human and Religious Sciences) in Florence, Italy.*



EKM2015 – from upper left to lower right: 1. Relais "Stibbert", 2. San Marino, 3. Florence, 4. the Old Bridge (Ponte Vecchio)

# Homosexuality—Through One Parent's Eyes

By George Babcock with his wife, Fern

<http://www.enoughroomfilm.com/>

I first heard of homosexuals in the 1950s when I was in academy. Rumor had it that one of the dorm guys was a “homo.” That caused quite a bit of underground buzz among a few students, but others remained totally oblivious. When a famous Seventh-day Adventist psychologist spoke at boys’ dorm worship, he addressed the subject rather briefly, assuring the boys that although they might have occasional attractions to other boys, it would all go away once they were married. Unfortunately, some believed him and wrecked the lives of innocent women before deciding that their attractions to other men were not a teenage whim.

During the 1960s when my wife and I were working for the Adventist church in the field of education, we heard rumors of a pastor who had been dismissed for homosexuality. We were shocked, as we’d not heard of such a thing before. Infidelity or adultery, yes, but not homosexuality. Then we heard of a teacher fired for the same reason. It seemed like a growing thing—but looking back now, we think that the gay movement was just beginning to come out of the closet.

In the ‘70s, we began to discover that some of our friends were gay. One of our classmates divorced her husband for that reason, and we sympathized with her as she tried to raise her two girls. Ten years later she confided to us that one of the girls was a lesbian—but by then her ex-husband had died, and she was more understanding of the problem and maintained a good relationship with her daughter. Another friend went into the hospital and died of AIDS. After his death his wife revealed his gay orientation and became part of a support group for wives of gay men. By this time, we had nothing but sympathy for gay men who tried to be straight but failed and for wives who were abandoned and struggling.

In the 1980s, I was in the General Conference Education Department when SDA Kinship, an organization I’d never heard of, distributed flyers on the Andrews University campus offering a phone number to call if you weren’t sure of your sexual orientation. This outraged the General Conference president who called me in and ordered me to find out who this “Kinship group” was and what was going on.

I contacted the SDA Kinship president who invited me to an upcoming board meeting and asked that I provide the worship thought for the day. There in California I met a group of gay and straight Seventh-day Adventists, sincere and respectful, working together to figure out how to encourage LGBT Adventists to hang onto a relationship with the Lord and avoid despair and depression. What could Kinship do to contact troubled youth and how could the church members’ attitudes be softened toward those who

through no fault of their own seemed unable to relate romantically to people of the opposite sex? When I heard how many gays commit suicide and how many unsuccessfully tried and prayed and worked for a change in their lives, my heart ached. Surely this whole group of people should not be shunned or despised. Christ wouldn’t have treated them as some of His people did. I returned to the GC with my report, but it didn’t make the brethren very happy.

In the 1980s the AIDS epidemic swept America and the first AIDS quilt commemorating those who had died from the disease was spread out on the National Mall near the Washington Monument. Thousands of people walked past the quilt, each block representing an AIDS victim. Some had pictures of the deceased, personal T-shirts, flowers, and memorabilia of all types. I remember the picture of a baby who died of AIDS, his tiny toys sewed onto the quilt. Suddenly all the anonymous victims began to seem real, their hopes and dreams dashed, the people who loved them grieving. They were no longer disgusting gays. They were real, hurting humans. The quilt worked.



In the middle of the ‘80s, our family’s whole outlook on the issue of homosexuality was severely challenged. Our daughter, Sherri, who had traveled to Pohnpei in the South Pacific to teach math for a year at the island’s Adventist





Sherri

school, climbed the hill that held a satellite dish and called the States. Amidst tears and static, Sherri told her mother she just *had* to talk to Daddy. Wasn't he in Asia somewhere? No, she couldn't explain the problem because the phone line wasn't secure. Just try to find Daddy. My wife caught the desperation in her voice and assured her she would try to get in touch with me. At the time, I was in the Philippines visiting and evaluating schools as part of my job at the General Conference.

When the message reached me, I became alarmed. Sherri had always been a steady, non-emotional girl, pastor of two of her high school classes, valedictorian and president of her senior class. I'd never known her to be frantic and crying for her daddy. She wouldn't insist on seeing me unless it was really important. I quickly canceled some appointments and found a plane to Pohnpei. Unfortunately, only one plane from Manila flew in and out of that island each week. But I reached my daughter and spent the week with her. She eagerly showed me her island, took me by motorcycle to see beautiful places, and said not a word about any "problem" until the last night of my visit. As we sat together in the dark on the flat roof of her student missionary quarters she began to cry. Then she said words I can never forget.

"Dad, I am a homosexual."

A thousand thoughts raced through my head. What would this mean in her life? What would it mean to our family? How would our church react to this news? The church had rules and I was an ordained minister. But my weeping daughter came first.

Wrapping my arms around her, I cried with her and assured her of my love and her mother's. She feared that as a minister I might be fired for having a lesbian daughter. She told me of her struggle to be heterosexual, of the days, months, and years she'd spent trying to do everything right according to the rules of the church. She had prayed in vain that God would change her, give her a new heart, a new outlook. She'd even given a year of her life to student missions. But nothing had changed. She loved God but couldn't help how she was wired.

The next morning I flew off to resume my itinerary while my wife in the States waited impatiently for my return. I did

assure her that our daughter was not pregnant or raped, and I'd be home soon to explain.

That year proved difficult for all of us. The island school begged her to stay another year, but she returned to Andrews University and changed her major from math education to engineering. She was beginning to realize that she would never be able to teach math in an Adventist school as she'd planned. At Andrews she received counseling, but nothing seemed to help. After that year she transferred to Walla Walla College for engineering.

As usual, she did exceptionally well scholastically and became the lead student in the engineering class. But that year convinced her that she was alone with her problem. Not daring to talk to anyone, she threw herself into her schoolwork and tried to forget. Isolated and lonely, she made it through her junior year and returned home that summer to work in the General Conference.

Her senior year proved more difficult and stressful. At one point she had a daunting final project that required hours of computations on her engineering calculator. Wanting to get outside for a bit, she and another girl walked to a nearby park, settled themselves under a tree, and began to work. Several hours later, the girls got up to stretch and run to the edge of the lake which was within viewing distance of their study area. The nearly deserted park only contained a few students, and Sherri left her backpack and books lying on the blanket. Although she wasn't gone long, when she returned, her backpack, high tech calculator and the meticulous notes she had taken all quarter for all of her subjects had vanished.

That night she called us in tears again. She just couldn't face doing all that work over, pages of calculations had disappeared along with her engineering calculator. She had a deadline to reach, end of quarter tests were coming up, and she had no notes on any subject. As she saw it, her engineering career had gone up in smoke, she was still struggling with her sexuality, and everything had gone wrong. She just wanted to quit college. Our daughter sounded so hopeless and despairing that we were alarmed.

At that point, I remembered the SDA Kinship organization and told Sherri about it. I made her promise that if she would stay in school and finish her last quarter before graduation, I'd contact SDA Kinship and see if there was anyone she could talk to about homosexuality. And meanwhile, she would talk to the professor who had assigned the large project and plead for extra time to reconstruct her work. At last she promised to stay and finish.

I called Kinship, and was given the names and phone numbers of two lesbian members in southern California who were willing to talk to a young woman in distress over her sexuality. When Sherri called them, they welcomed her



call, talked to her for hours, and finally invited her to visit them during her upcoming spring break.

Before leaving for break, she told her teacher about the stolen backpack and pled for mercy. Knowing that Sherri was always honest and did faithful work, the good man assured her that he would accept her paper after the vacation and reaffirmed her ability to complete the project with excellence.

That vacation proved to be a turning point for all of us. The Kinship women welcomed her with understanding and acceptance. They encouraged her and gave her the name of a safe faculty member to talk to at Walla Walla. She returned to Walla Walla, finished her paper, and contacted the safe faculty member who sympathized, gave her books to read, and helped her understand more about her sexuality. Just having someone to talk to, someone non-judgmental and supportive gave her the courage to finish the year and graduate at the top of her class. We thanked God for caring, loving people who could nurture and comfort our daughter when we were a continent away. I was so glad that I'd become acquainted with SDA Kinship before I ever knew we'd need their support.

That summer Kinship held a Kampmeeting in Maryland, not far from our home. Sherri came home and worked at the General Conference again that summer, but took time to attend the gathering of Seventh-day Adventist homosexuals. She urged us to join her on Sabbath, and we agreed, not knowing quite what to expect.

We found the Kinship group having worship, sharing life stories, listening to a guest minister presenting a sermon on one's relationship with Christ, singing hymns, laughing at one another's jokes, and relaxing in the safe camp atmosphere. Young people told of when they first knew they were different, if and when they had come "out" to their parents and friends, and how they had been treated since. We listened with heavy hearts as some told of parents who had disowned them, churches which had disfellowshipped them, and friends who dropped them. When the group found out we were Sherri's parents, several came to thank us for attending and supporting not only our daughter, but them as well. One girl whose mother had rejected her came to my wife and said, "I wish you'd been *my* mother. Would you give me a hug?" My wife complied at once, and for the rest of the day tried to minister to this hurting young lesbian.

**A**fter the news about our daughter hit the Adventist hotline, we got all sorts of advice. Take her to this group for "change ministry," get her away from her evil friends, help her to understand that as long as she's living this lifestyle, she is not welcome at home. And on and on. Very few said we should just love her and keep her!

Some declared that we should love the sinner but hate

the sin, a non-Biblical concept at best. I've not seen that work very well. Frequently the church says, "We love you, but you can't sing in our choir. It would be a bad example for others." Or "We love you, but you can't sing or play for special music anymore." Or "We love you, but don't speak up in Sabbath School class. Your comments wouldn't be appreciated." "Yes, you're an excellent teacher, but we can't hire you." "Wouldn't you be more comfortable in the church across town?" When I heard of the children of lesbians who had been denied a Christian education because of their mothers' orientation, I wondered "Where is the love?" I cannot imagine a loving Jesus saying such unloving things.

As I read the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, I discover that the revelation of God's love is the last and most important message He has for us to give to the world. Not a message of rules and regulations, not just a warning about the end time and sudden destruction, but a message of unconditional love. I do not argue theology with the church, but I certainly take issue at the way some members treat people who are not just like themselves. This applies not only to homosexuals, but to those of various ethnicities or races.

Fortunately, attitudes are changing, I believe. More churches welcome anyone to join in their worship. Many are realizing that churches are hospitals for sinners, not fortresses for saints. I'm thankful that my daughter's local Adventist church is warm and welcoming, that her spouse can sing in the church choir, and their two children are accepted in the church school. When I baptized my eldest granddaughter in that church two years ago, it was with a very thankful heart that she had been under the influence of Christian parents and school teachers.

When gays began making news some years ago, I had no idea that gay couples would ever be allowed to form permanent legal unions. Now many of the couples we know are legally bound together, and we think that's a good thing for stability and family.



When Sherri found her love, Jill, it seemed an answer to her prayers. Raised as a good Methodist, Jill had a relation-

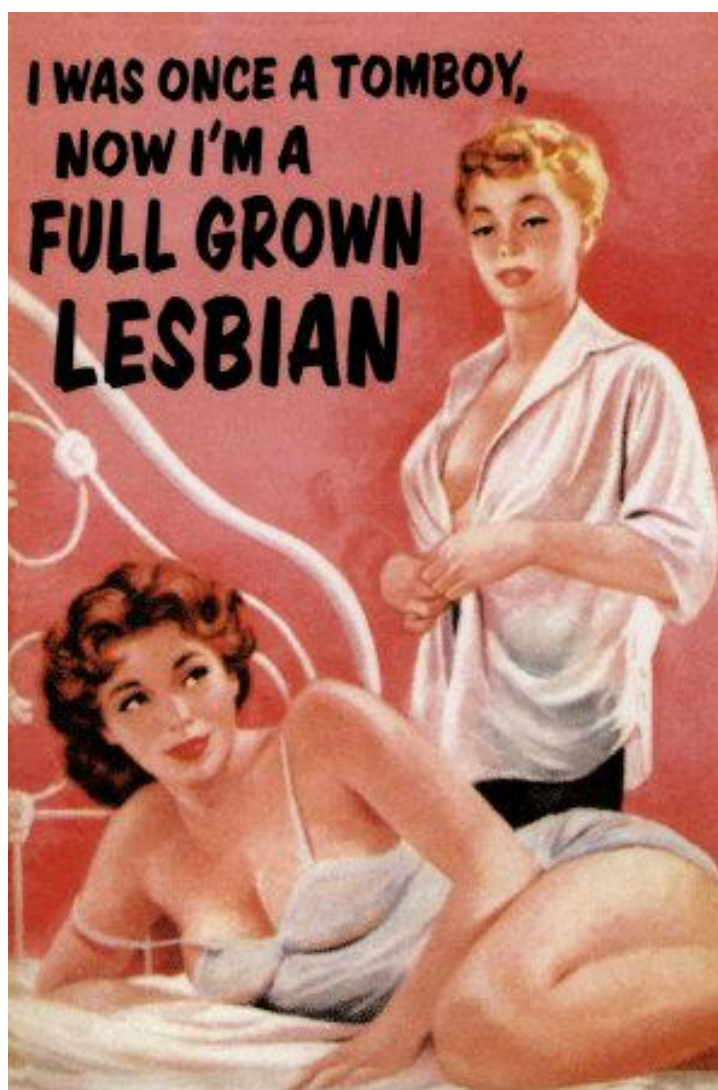
ship with Jesus, delighted in her social work with the elderly, and had a wonderful sense of humor. Jill's father, an administrator of a local Methodist conference and delegate to their General Conference, had been assigned to investigate the "homosexual issue" for his church before two of his daughters revealed that they were lesbian. God seems to have prepared both our families to understand and accept the girls He has given us.

Sherri and Jill have been together for 23 years now. Jill has proven to be a wonderful mother to Grace and Faith, and we couldn't ask for a better daughter-in-law. She is so loving, hard-working, and caring, organizing Adventurers in the Adventist church and visiting the sick and hurting, helping with potlucks and transportation to the Adventist school. Since losing her own mother to cancer a few years ago, Jill treats my wife as her mother and calls her frequently for advice or to talk about our two grandchildren, Grace and Faith.

As more information about sexual orientation comes to light, I am hoping that people will realize that one doesn't choose one's sexuality. I'm hoping that more Christian people will decide that this matter is one that must be left in God's hands and that we are not here to judge, but to love one another.

When my granddaughter Grace was four, my wife took her into a side room during a Kinship Kampmeeting so she could play with felts while I preached to the group. Evidently she was listening as she played, because when I declared, "What we need is grace!" She flew out of the room and up the aisle calling, "Here I am, Grandpa!"

What an object lesson! I treasure it still, and I think the key to the future for our LGBTI brothers and sisters is "lots of grace" and a heart full of love. We're leaving the judging to God.



## *Are you a real lesbian?*

By Michele O'Mara

**N**o one is ever surprised when they learn I am a lesbian. Well, I suppose my grandma did seem a little taken aback, asking, "How did that happen?" Interestingly though, aside from my appearance, I am seriously lacking when it comes to a lot of common stereotypes of a lesbian. My friends even tease me, saying my card-carrying status as a lesbian is in danger!

Of course we don't actually carry lesbian identity cards. That would be silly. The process is really much more efficient than that. The Bureau of Motor Vehicles provides an endorsement that is placed directly on your driver's license.

Ask your gay and lesbian friends if you can see their driver's license. If they are really gay (meaning they passed the Gay or Lesbian Endorsement Test at the BMV), there should be a faint rainbow that is visible over his or her photo when held at the right angle, in the right light.

Okay, so that's not really true.

Can you imagine if there was such an endorsement? I can see it now—we will all be provided with a government-created, computer-generated test.





I'm thinking the Lesbian Endorsement Test might look something like this (remember, this would be created by the government):

1. Do you hate men? (Clearly the test would be different for gay men.)
2. Do you have multiple pets that you call your "children"?
3. Do you have a motorcycle or a valid license to drive one?
4. Do you have season tickets for a WNBA team of your choice?
5. Are you a vegetarian?
6. Were you considered a tomboy growing up?
7. Do you wear Patchouli?
8. Can you find whatever you need at Lowe's (your favorite store) without asking?
9. Is your hair uncharacteristically short for a woman?
10. Are you currently on a recreational softball team?

Now anyone with any sense knows that this test is nothing but a pile of stereotypes. Obviously. Clearly this test is not accurate. Because if it were, I would not get my endorsement!

I can only affirm three answers and have serious qualifications on two. #3 (and if it weren't for my wife and sons I would have no pets), #6 (and I have pictures to prove it!), and #8 (but I've barely completed season one). For a long time #9 applied, but I can't even claim that one now. So according to this test I am roughly 30% lesbian.

The point is—and I do have one—there is no right way to be gay or lesbian. There's only a right way to be you. The only right thing is to be real. Be yourself.

Despite my failure to meet the above qualifications for the Lesbian Endorsement Test, as I indicated already, most people I encounter assume I am gay. And I'm good with that. In fact, I find that it's a good strategy to assume all people are gay unless it is revealed otherwise. I appreciate it when folks get the clue without my having to break it down

for them. I want people to know I am a lesbian, and for one reason only: because I am.

Once while shopping for cars with my partner, Teresa, the salesman asked, "Are you two sisters?" To which I replied, "No, we are partners." Still not getting it, he said, "Oh, what's your business?" Without skipping a beat I said, "Love." He didn't ask us another question.

Those who are heterosexual are quick to talk openly about their boyfriend/husband or girlfriend/wife, and many are so bold they even frame pictures of themselves with their heterosexual significant others and broadcast their relationship right there on their desk at work! They go on and on about their weekends together, future vacations, and other plans. It's easy to know who they are. These people can't stop flaunting their heterosexuality to save themselves! And I love it. They are real in ways that they take for granted. They are real in ways that they don't even stop to think about. They are real about their lives without even thinking because it is socially sanctioned and encouraged to the point it's not even a thought anymore.

Gays and lesbians, on the other hand, don't generally feel as comfortable to express their true selves. I find that disappointing. Many of us have been brainwashed to believe that censorship is the key to survival. Perhaps that's the appeal of Halloween. I was reading an article online by David Frum at the *CNN Opinion* (November 1, 2010) where he traces the roots of the modern day appeal of Halloween to the gay culture.

The "masked culture" first developed by the gays of San Francisco has reached across the lines of orientation—and now jumped across the boundaries between nations and languages.

The article goes on to say, "In 1994, University of Florida anthropologist Jerry Kugelmass published a book on the new trend, "Masked Culture," describing Halloween as an emerging gay "high holiday."

Halloween is *not* my high holiday (just another ding on my lesbian endorsement record). I was never too into costumes growing up, though I did win my kindergarten costume contest. I was an angel. That was the same year I got my tongue stuck to the frozen flag pole on the playground. Irony is priceless, isn't it?

Halloween is now centered around the joy it brings to my sons. And my wife, too—because she, who is never mistaken for—or assumed to be—a lesbian, loves Halloween. Her lesbian endorsement is probably safer than mine will ever be because she also loves animals (more than people, really), she drives a big truck, she has read every Rita Mae Brown book written, she was a Martina Navratilova fan before I even knew who she was, and she had a vegetarian parent which surely puts her closer to vegetarianism.



My wife and I are very different “kinds of lesbians.” Mostly because we are just different kind of people, and we are people first. We have personalities, likes, interests, strengths, and challenges that have nothing to do with our being gay.



If someone offers you advice about how to be a lesbian, I suggest you thank them kindly for their words of advice and promptly erase them all from your short term memory. Then pick up a blank journal and write on the top of the first page—“Who I am, what I think, how I feel, what I love, and what I believe.” Fill it with your truth. Whatever that is. Start by taking your mask off at home. Then begin to live those pages out in the world. Keep filling them as you age, change, and grow.

I feel so grateful to spend so many hours each week with people sharing themselves honestly and openly, without their masks. It is my favorite thing about being a therapist, and I can’t help but like each and every one of the people with whom I work—because they are real.

People who know us best are able to be real because of one thing: we are real with them! When we are real, people can know us. When people know us, they can feel close to us. When people feel close to us, they like us. When they like us, we feel comfortable to be real. What a perfect circle.

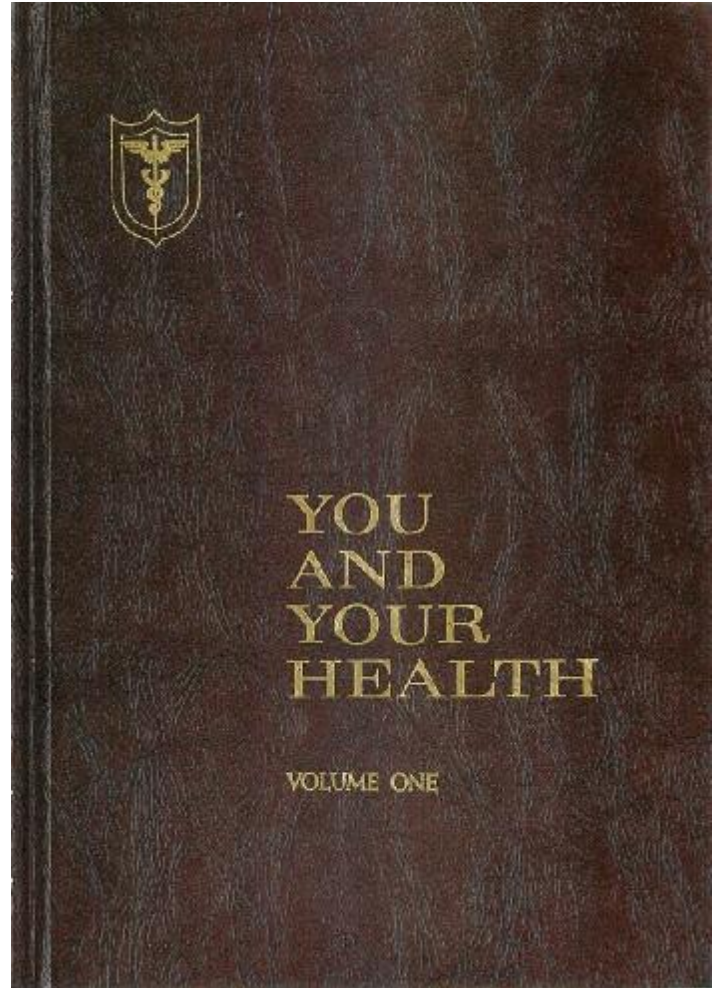
So that’s why I say—get real. However that looks for you. Lose your masks; create your own brand of gay or lesbian. Just be yourself.



# Journey

By Jerry McKay

(Part IV)



## Sources of Distress

Before continuing with the chronological part of my story, I want to look at two written sources that compounded my confusion and distress: the “homosexual” passage in Romans chapter one and an article in the Adventist health encyclopedia, *You and Your Health*.

Having read the Bible for years, I was familiar with the book of Romans but not the details. I was more familiar with the story of Sodom because my read-the-Bible-in-a-year momentum had usually dried up by April—well before I would have reached Romans. Besides, I usually focused on reading the gospels. It was only when I studied Romans for those Bible classes in high school that I became aware of what Paul seemed to say about people like me.



Perhaps you have never read Romans chapter one; or, if you have, it may have been awhile. I have included the relevant section here—Romans 1: 18-28. As you read it, try to put yourself in my shoes—a teenager who had had unrelenting attractions to the same sex since adolescence. The verses that haunted me most are in bold.

*18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.*

*19. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.*

*21. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. 22. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23. and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. 24. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.*

*25. Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26. For this reason God gave them up to the dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, 27. and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. 28. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge*

*God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.*

Now that you have read the text, I must ask: If you believed this passage applied to you, how would you have felt? What would it have done to your spirit?

It is next to impossible to describe the effect this passage had on me. Im-



agine the frustration and angst it created every time I felt some variation of those *unnatural* desires Paul spoke of. Add to that the fact that my attractions involved my Christian friends. With every attraction, I heard Paul talking about the wrath of God, ungodliness, suppressing the truth, becoming fools, and God giving *those* people up to their dishonorable passions and shameless acts.

The knockout, however, came from my plain reading of the text. I mention this interpretative principle, because in segments of the church it is emphasized as “the way” to interpret scripture.

If we were discussing a legal statute, Wikipedia would remind us that in a plain reading world each word should be interpreted according to the ordinary meaning of the language unless otherwise defined. Ordinary words should be given their ordinary meaning, technical terms their technical meaning, and local, cultural terms recognized where applicable.

When it comes to the Bible, the application is similar. The plain meaning of plain reading is that the Bible should be taken at face value—it says what it says and it means what it means. That interpretive principle also suggests that we not read anything into the text. In reality, this principle is seldom applied consistently because very quickly we realize that scripture has to be interpreted.

In a recent conversation, a friend made this insightful comment about plain reading as it applies to scripture. He said he found “the idea of a ‘plain reading’ to be a rather frightening and obscuring phrase. You are reading ancient texts; there is, therefore, a richness and mystery inherent in it. There is nothing ‘plain’ about the process of encountering such a phenomenon.”

No matter how much I agree with his sentiment now, I did not approach Romans chapter one as a mystery with

richness to be mined when I was in my teens. I was very much a plain-reading guy.

It is not my intention to contextualize, analyze, or interpret this passage here. I'm only going to share how I read it and applied it to myself. There are others that have researched this passage competently. If you are interested in that research, I recommend these authors.

**W**hen I was in my teens, I didn't use an interpretive filter. Without a filter, Paul said that it was because *"they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator"* that *"God gave them up to the dishonorable passions."*

From this, I understood that my attractions were the result of *my* failure to worship God correctly. I did not understand scripture to say that God was angry *because* they did unnatural things. Rather, God had handed them over to their dishonorable passions *because* of their idolatrous ways. For me, this scripture said that the impure hearts and shameless acts of those people were *because of* their distorted worship of God. Reading Paul this way had profound implications for me.

At the time, I was not able to make the distinction between what I was feeling as a teenager and the ritualized sexual practices of those idolatrous worshipers. I had become a Christian as a child and had been as intentional about worshiping God as faithfully as possible. The idea that God did this to me, or allowed this to happen to me, because I had failed to worship Him properly was confounding.

Even though I never had one *unnatural exchange* during high school, I did long to hold a friend's hand or snuggle up to a friend or two. When I found a friend's eyes beautiful, I wanted to look into them as he looked into the eyes of his sweetheart. Because all of my emotional and physical responses

were directed toward my male friends, I saw myself in the same crowd as that described in Romans.

Link Paul's comments with Jesus' statement, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he," and you can understand how I felt I couldn't win for losing. Believing that Romans chapter one was speaking about me was spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically damaging. It contaminated my understanding of God, and it added to the insidious numbing of my soul. The prayer life that I enjoyed was constantly overshadowed by this passage. Years later, I would become aware of the nuanced ways theologians could interpret this text, but it was too late. The damage was done.

In a later section, I will expand on the nuanced interpretation I was introduced to and give examples of how I was to apply it to changing my orientation. In short, I was encouraged not to take the reference personally. Rather, I should see it as having a universal application. I was told Romans one was speaking about the human condition in general. We are all idolaters by nature, and we are all complicit in suppressing the truth of God. The phrases *wrath of God* and *handed them over* meant that God has left all of us to our own devices and the consequences of our choices.

Romans does imply choice when it says, "women *exchanged* natural relations for unnatural and the men likewise..." In context, it is speaking about the choices adults make. I was introduced to an application of the word *exchanged* for an adolescent context. I will get into the subtleties of that interpretation later, as well. For now, you need only know that I was encouraged to see my orientation as one manifestation of all human brokenness.

As if to minimize or normalize my sin, I was reminded that "we are all sinners." That nuance was supposed to be of some comfort. In some ways, I

guess it was. However, I soon learned that with this topic few people really think this way. All sin and sinners are not treated equally in scripture, and we do not treat each other as though all sin were equal.

In reality, under this collective experience of God's handing us over, most of humanity struggles with gluttony, drunkenness, anger management, or gossip; and five percent of us get to be homosexual.

If the we-are-all-sinners sentiment were true, folk like me would not be labeled the abominations of the world, blamed for the destruction of two Old Testament cities, and constantly reminded that scripture orders that I be stoned to death. As well, all the woes of the world from terrorist attacks to catastrophic natural disasters would not be attributed to my existence. More often than not, the phrase "we are all sinners" has a very hollow ring to it.

Years later, when I did share my plain-reading understanding, I could tell many were uncomfortable with it. The idea that a young adult would think such harsh things about himself or believe God would do this to me disturbed people. I was often puzzled at how quickly my plain reading of scripture was, in fact, interpreted. As I said, more about all of this later.



**O**ne upside to being a teenager in the '70s was that I was spared the experience of sitting through sermons



focused on that passage. At that time, few pastors preached on the topic.

The Stonewall Riots in New York City in June of 1969 that set the “gay liberation movement” in motion were given little notice by most Christians. I don’t remember being aware of what was happening in New York City, either. Even if people were aware of those events, most dismissed them as far removed and in the gay ghettos of notorious cities. No one assumed that a student at a Christian school, especially one on track to become a minister could be one of those people—a homosexual.

There have been great strides in understanding since then, but there is a downside. In the ‘70s, most Christian campuses and Christian homes were relatively safe places for an LGBT teenager—the loneliness, confusion and isolation, notwithstanding—because we were not subjected to the hurtful comments we often hear today.

The public nature of the topic means *we* are talked about everywhere. While dialog is usually a good thing, many continue to assume that *we* are not sitting in the pews of local churches or around the dining room tables of the nation. Never make that assumption. Either as guests or as your children—we are there.

I have often felt the sting of comments that are devoid of understanding and empathy, because I can pass! I can pass as heterosexual, I mean. I can sit at your table and you would not assume I was one of *those*, because I don’t present with all the stereotypical mannerisms that secular and church media like to focus on. Sadly, the secular media likes to shock with sensational images while the church uses the same images to mock. In all cases, we are all diminished.

I am well aware of the larger concerns that seem to be buried in this text, but unexamined comments have the potential to create more harm than good. I don’t mean that we should dismiss what the Bible says. Rather, if we are going to make this passage in Romans the basis of our next sermon, I hope we do the hard work involved in mining it for the “richness and mystery inherent in it,” as my friend suggested. It still hurts when I hear or read certain comments, but I am able to recover faster now. It’s the teenager or the person too emotionally beaten up to defend himself or herself that I really feel for.

The Wikipedia entry had a very important caveat to the plain-reading approach. It should be used “unless,” Wiki cautioned, “the result would be cruel or absurd.” Good advice, I think.

“

It’s not how much you have  
that makes people look up to you,  
it’s who you are.

—Elvis Presley

# connection

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# The Book & the Beach

## Wedding

