

## AMY'S STORY

*Amy joined a support group for families and friends of gays and lesbians because she had a gay brother, but before long she admitted to herself that, in reality, she had joined because she needed to deal with her own sexuality.*

## I Don't Want to Be Gay!

**February.** Amy wrote: "I learned about SDA-FFLAG when I stopped at the *Someone to Talk to* booth at a convention in Orlando a few years ago. I would like to join this support group because my brother is gay. He was married for over 20 years and has two children in college. He has been in a gay relationship for five years now and seems truly happy for the first time in his life. I care for both him and his partner very much, but I am deeply troubled because my brother doesn't believe there is any place for him in the Adventist Church. Barring a miracle, I doubt if he will ever come to an Adventist church again. And since I am actively involved in the church, he seems to think I cannot accept them for who they really are. He no longer stays in close contact with any of our family."

Several weeks after this post, Amy contacted the list moderator in great distress, explaining that although she thought she had joined because of her brother, she had finally faced the awareness deep in her heart that she needed to deal with her own homosexuality.

"It is very hard for me to think that, and even harder for me to say it. I never intended to tell anyone, but I feel a need to share it with someone and I believe this is a safe place. I do not ever intend to "come out." I am married, with children, and am an elder in my church. I am not willing to give up these things that are important to me, but I need to share with someone. I don't want someone to tell me it's okay. I might start becoming obsessed with that thought and end up doing something I really don't want to do (although I *do* on an emotional level).

"I have to admit I am freaking out about this and scared of where it may lead. I need assurance that no one will pressure me to "come out" or demean me for not being strong enough to do it. I hope this makes sense."

Amy went on to explain that twenty years earlier, when she was teaching in an Adventist college before her marriage, she had had a brief lesbian relationship, the only sexual experience that had ever felt real and satisfying, but she had not been willing to accept that she was "that way" and quickly ended it. Since then she had not allowed herself to develop a crush on another woman, although when she was in a vulnerable emotional state she realized that she would find comfort in such a relationship.

"While my relationship with my husband is far from satisfying, on many levels, it is a commitment I made 'till death do us part.' Right now he is working in another city and only comes home on the weekends – sometimes every other weekend. This separation actually feels good to me. I can't handle the closeness and can tolerate the weekends because I know it's only three days until he leaves again.

“Also I find a lot of satisfaction in my church work and don’t feel I can give that up. So I think what I have to give up is the opportunity to have an emotionally intimate relationship with another person. I’ve never expressed my feelings at this depth before, and it is really releasing a lot of pent-up emotions. I’m not sure I want to open it up because there is nowhere to go with it. I still have to give up *something*, and now I am more aware of the pain that goes with it.”

Over the next week, emails flew back and forth between Amy and the moderator. It was difficult for her to know what she wanted to do. At one point she thought of leaving the group.

“What is opening up for me is very frightening and overwhelming. I’m sure now that my underlying reason for joining the forum was not for my brother at all; it was for me. But I don’t think it will resolve anything.”

The moderator assured Amy that she understood. “I have talked with many heterosexual people who have been married to a gay or lesbian partner. Most of them have been aware at some level that there is something missing in their relationship – a lack of intimate bonding at their core. Do you think your husband might sense this?

“I do understand your desire to maintain your present life, but if it is on a less-than-honest basis, will it withstand the pressures of a lifetime? Perhaps you could talk to your husband about your feelings and assure him that you want to do everything to save your marriage. There are therapists who will work with you on this.

“I have heard many, many stories like yours. You are not alone. If you like, I could put you in touch with another lesbian who was married to a beloved theologian. I know she would be very sensitive to your feelings.”

Amy replied, “I know what you are saying is true about the lack of emotional intimacy in my marriage. I just cannot fathom taking the steps that would be necessary to get to that “other” life. I would like to talk to this person, but am very frightened about where it might lead. I need to deal with it, but do not really want to go there. I really had no idea of the intensity of my feelings about this issue until now.”

After an email contact with JoAnn, the other lesbian, Amy wrote to her and the moderator, “Thanks so very much for your prayers. It is such a natural thing when going through a crisis to ask others for their prayers, but in this sort of crisis I don’t have the freedom to do that, so your prayers mean a lot, as do your support and insights.

“I am not prone to anxiety attacks, but I am on the verge of one now. My defenses are so strong that at times I almost believe I have just created this crisis in my mind and that it’s not really an issue. But deep inside I know it is. What am I to do? I know I can’t go back to denial and suppression, but I don’t see how I can go forward, either. I am crying a lot.

“I find that I cannot pray. I feel so guilty for letting myself think about being a lesbian. Somehow, it seems okay for other people to deal with it, but not me. I feel I am letting God down and cheating on my husband by thinking about this. I can’t sort out my

feelings of needing to be honest with myself and feeling that I'm sinning by having these thoughts.

"I'm supposed to go to elders' meeting tonight, but I feel like I can't in the state I'm in. On one hand, I need to do normal, routine things, but on the other, I feel that I am being a hypocrite. I feel I need to repent of thinking these thoughts and stuff it all back in. I am so confused and scared! I need to pull myself together to go pick up my son at school. It's too hard and scary to do this for myself when I don't even know if it's the right thing to do. I think I'm going crazy. I want to run away from this one minute, and run away from my life as I know it the next. I really hate myself. I don't know what to do! I know I'm not making sense."

Amy debated about whether she should resign as an elder, and the moderator urged her not to rush into anything. When JoAnn was unable to return her emails for a couple of days, Amy wrote:

"I'm having intense second thoughts about this whole thing. I think I'm going about it all wrong. I need to see a professional counselor. I need so much support and guidance and it's wrong to depend on JoAnn to give me that. I am feeling very crazy today, and just want it to stop before it goes out of control. I haven't gotten much sleep for the past couple months and I'm not in a good situation to deal with all the anxiety and fear I'm having. I have a million things I should be doing, but I just can't focus on anything. I feel like I'm losing my mind. I keep thinking I need to get out and walk. I know it would be therapeutic. But I am just immobilized"

Over the next few days, Amy had several long phone conversations with JoAnn and her former husband, who helped her tremendously with working through her feelings of guilt. At last, after a very intense week, she told the moderator she would like to re-subscribe to the support list with the understanding that she was a lesbian, but using a pseudonym. In her opening post, she remembered being something of a tomboy growing up and going through a period of wishing she could be a boy. She had had a few infatuations with women but convinced herself that she just wanted to be close to them. After her one lesbian experience, she vowed never to let this happen again.

She said she had dated quite a bit but had difficulty being emotionally and physically intimate with men. She really wanted to get married, in order to prove to herself that she was "normal," but she had never felt emotionally close to or sexually aroused by her husband.

"I feel like I have been in hell this past week," she said. "The first time I felt any peace was after the moderator asked you all to pray for my situation. I know people were praying because I suddenly felt a sense of calmness that had to come from God."

The other members of the support list welcomed Amy warmly in her new identity. They shared some of their experiences to give her courage and offered her their support and love. One person, a gay man who had not "come out" to himself or his wife until he was 45, told her:

“I know people who have spent their life’s energy maintaining their closet. They have not even come out to their spouses. But this has caused illness, early aging, and other undesirable consequences. Is the price worth it? To me, it is not. I have gone to hell and back in the last ten years, but I know now that I did the right thing by being honest with myself and my family. I believe I am where God wants me to be. Coming out can be very, very difficult, but I personally believe that God will help you through what seems impossible if you depend on Him and ask His help.”

Others assured her that she need not lose her opportunity to minister because of admitting her homosexuality. They told of accepting churches that welcomed their gifts or of new ministries God had given them as a result of their openness.

One of the pastors on the list who was the father of a lesbian daughter addressed Amy’s feelings of guilt:

“I think many of us heap more guilt upon ourselves than what we need to. I felt a lot of guilt over my daughter. I felt responsible for her having a lesbian relationship. But the thing that helped me was focusing on God’s grace. You mentioned feeling strange about going to church last night with all these conflicting thoughts in your mind. If truth were known, probably many of us come to church with troubling things going on in our minds. To me, one of the beauties of the church is that we can come as we are and find God’s loving grace there.”

Amy responded, “What dear people you all are. Thank you so much for all your affirmation and encouragement over the past couple of days (has it really only been that long?) I really don’t think I could have survived without you!

“I am still in a state of shock over the events of the past week. If anyone had told me a few weeks ago where I would be now I could not have believed them! I am still terrified. I am still going through denial and ambivalence. It is such a confusing process.

“My husband is home for the weekend and it is such a strain. I know now that I do not belong in this marriage, that he deserves better than to be lied to. I never thought about what this was doing to him. I have always been a faithful and supportive wife, and I thought I was giving him what he needs and deserves. But I am beginning to see that this is not the case, and will be even less so now that I have confronted who I really am. Please don’t stop praying for me over this weekend. It is going to be so hard.”

A wife, whose former husband had finally admitted his homosexuality after 33 years of marriage, said that as painful as her experience had been she wouldn’t have wanted things to go on as they were. She said that realizing what the “problem” was and that it wasn’t something wrong with her brought a great sense of relief and eventually helped restore her self-confidence.

Another list member told her, “The pain you and your husband will undoubtedly experience if you come out to him is not your fault, but the result of living in a church and society that didn’t prepare you to accept your sexuality and avoid a straight marriage. Even if this marriage was a mistake, God has blessed you with two wonderful children and the opportunity to serve Him as an elder in your church.”

A mother told her that 16 years after learning her son is gay, she was able to look back at that very painful experience and thank God for the love, tolerance, and understanding it had given her for others who are suffering.

When her husband left after the weekend, Amy wrote to the group, saying that she had managed to stuff her feelings back in the box successfully while he was home. She told of her dread over going to her Sabbath School class, which always started by going around the circle with each one telling how their week had gone. She knew she couldn't lie, but finally decided to simply say it had been a very difficult week.

"Our lesson was talking about social issues pertaining to family and marriage, and of course the issue of homosexuality came up – twice – and in very negative ways. Right then I realized that if I ever do come out it will be a very tough situation in my church. I decided that can never happen and this has to be the end of it. I was glad I had stuffed everything back. And then JoAnn called this morning, and everything came spilling back out. I am still feeling intense ambivalence!

"I am feeling completely obsessed with this situation. I don't know any lesbian women around here, which is fortunate, as I think I am in grave danger of having an affair. I need your continued prayers.

"I *really* need to find a counselor and begin working through all this, but I don't know anyone in this area I can trust to respect my religious convictions, on one hand, and not attempt to convince me I am sinning, on the other."

Providentially, just at this time a marriage and family therapist who had joined the list to learn more about homosexuality so she could help her gay clients, but who had not posted for several months because of moving across the country, began posting again. The moderator contacted her privately to see if she would be willing to help Amy find a therapist. It turned out that she was able to do phone counseling and was a tremendous blessing to Amy over the next several months.

In early July, having just started divorce proceedings, she attended Kinship Kampmeeting in Orlando, Florida, where she found much love, understanding, and support.

**October.** Amy wrote: "I think of you often with a lot of appreciation for all you have done to help me over the past 8 months. Hard to believe it has been that long since I first contacted you about my crazy life situation. Back then I never imagined I would come through it. I was determined that I could never make the life changes necessary to be where I am now. I do appreciate the patience you gave me back then. I'm sure you were well aware of what would be inevitable in my life--leaving my husband and accepting myself as a lesbian. You were careful not to push me that direction but inserted reality just often enough to keep me from going back into the closet. And now I am in such a wonderful place in my life and am thankful to you for helping me get here...in so many ways."