

connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 37, No. 4, April 2013



*But only those
to whom it has
been given*

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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) nonprofit 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 1,550 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.

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 the address below or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)



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From the Editor

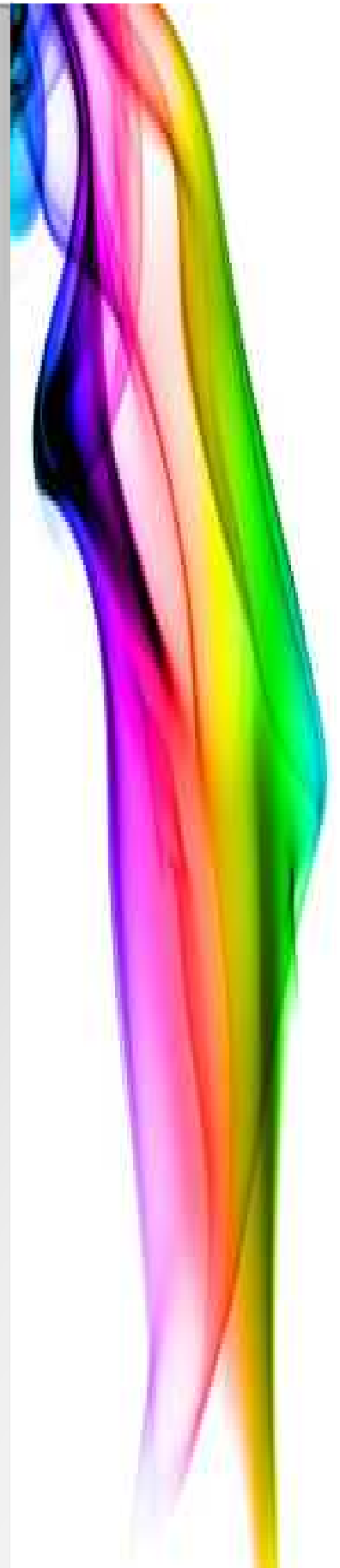
One week after her kindergarten graduation in 1944, the little girl who would have become my Aunt Janice began to have abdominal pain. Taken to the local doctor by her concerned parents, she was diagnosed with and given medication for worms. The pain worsened. The doctor next prescribed a laxative. Janis began to weep with pain. Her now panicked parents went to another doctor, but the misdiagnosed appendicitis had burst and caused a terrible case of peritonitis. Frantic phone calls were made to the nearest place with penicillin supplies, but the personnel there were unwilling to use their gas ration cards to deliver the antibiotic to a five-year-old 80 miles away. Her parents and six older siblings gathered around her in the hospital, forming a watch and working with the staff to support her as she tried to survive the infection. At a point when Janice seemed to rally, hospital nurses sent her family to a park across the street while they did some nursing care. During that time, five-year-old Janice died alone in her room. Stunned, Janice's family did not know how to even begin to grieve. Her mother lay awake through the scorching nights of a desert summer, trying to hold the threads of her emotional sanity together. Two older sisters went back to their work and school in Sacramento, not knowing how the power of their grief would reconstruct their lives.

Lois shifted from flight training to nursing. Ethel, a cautious, predictable bookkeeper, stayed at her job. Her transition came weeks later on a stifling August night before the advent of air conditioners. Lois talked her sister into going to Woolworth's soda fountain, and then they strolled toward the Sacramento Ballroom and the sounds of Benny Goodman. Backing their chairs against the wall, they settled down to enjoy the music.

From a distance, Lois noticed the only soldier at the ballroom slowly begin crossing the floor until he stopped in front of Ethel and asked her to dance. To Lois' shock, her staid, predictable sister took his hand and headed for the dance floor. Six weeks later, they were married, while those attending were thinking, "This will never last." Sixty-eight years later they were still holding hands. As he died last November, my Aunt Ethel, marshalling her mental forces in the confusion of stage two Alzheimer's, laid her hands quietly on his still chest and whispered, "Charlie, I will always love you. Don't forget, Charlie, I will love you forever."

Well-organized, steady, reserved Ethel Magorian would never normally have stepped on the dance floor with an unknown soldier. She would never normally have married someone after just six weeks' acquaintance. And she certainly would never normally have married someone going off to the fiery unknown of 1944 Okinawa. But, in the netherworlds of grief, her priorities, her sense of self, and her understanding of propriety shifted just long enough to give her the love of her life and the rest of us one of our favorite family members. The confusion and disorganization of grief is normal. It often wreaks havoc in our lives, leading us to make decisions we regret later. But sometimes, just sometimes, it is an opportunity to take a look at our life and our choices, to reevaluate what is truly important to us, and to make transitions that will bring us joy out of heartbreak. I hate the pain so many of you have lived. I wish it gone. You never deserve the losses that shred your dreams and part of your life. But when you can lift your head up, for just a brief moment, look for the unexpected opportunities that may be coming because you have to look at life through different lenses. In the meanwhile, you *must* take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



But only those to whom it has been given

By Andrew Dykstra

Based on Matthew 19

Jesus loved healing people. From Galilee to Judea large crowds followed Him; sick and suffering mortals stretched to glimpse the Saviour, yearning to be made whole. Now, whispers announce the approach of Pharisees. Would church leaders disperse this gathering of hope? Could they be healed before they have to leave?

The Pharisees resented Jesus and this unauthorized gathering. Though their enemy had no theological training, some could remember how profoundly He spoke in the temple, even as a 12-year-old. Why did He not study with one of their own? Jesus had chosen to bypass leaders and authorities and to immerse Himself with love in the lives of common people. His disciples were men who, in their youth, had been deemed unsuitable for rabbinic training and sent home to practice the trades of their fathers. Some were lowly fisherman.

Not wanting to attract the scrutiny of Roman officials and focused on avoiding the loss of their own authority, Pharisees feared having too many people gathered in one place. They had seen the power of John the Baptist in the desert. Luckily for the Pharisees, Romans had permitted the death of that troublemaker. Maybe they would do the same to Jesus. For now, hoping to defuse His influence, they made a plan to discredit the Teacher.

Jesus was healing the people and relieving their pain. Children loved to sit on His knee as He carefully listened to their thoughts, concerns, and stories. With this Man, they felt safe, loved, and important. I picture a small child moving closer to Jesus as the Pharisees approached.

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" The Pharisees omitted even a courteous greeting. Jesus listened to the trick question with which they interrupted His healing work. Moses had made a provision for divorce, often used by men as a legal loophole. Too frequently women were divorced because they could not bear sons or, perhaps, even because they were no longer sexually interesting. Wives were left destitute, because no respectable man wanted another man's castoff. The Pharisees expected Jesus to show respect for the Mosaic divorce law, because anyone who belittled Moses, his laws, or the temple services he helped institute was shunned and expelled

from the Jewish community. Jesus was having none of it.

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."

I believe that, by their question, the Pharisees inadvertently revealed their sexual frustration. Jesus countered their question with another. "Have you forgotten that the Creator made 'male and female' (Gen. 1:27), and that in another passage (Gen. 2:24) it is written that 'this is the reason a man leaves his parents so that he and his wife can be one flesh'?" While "one flesh" was an expression of the marriage bond, it clearly encompassed sexual bonding too. Many young men leave home, focused less on responsibilities than sexual fulfillment. Jesus challenged the Pharisees: "If you were so eager to leave home for the sake of your wives, why do you now seem in such a big hurry to leave them? You were once so attracted to them. God was willing to put His blessing on your union. What happened?"

Jesus had reminded the Pharisees about Eden, yes, but I wonder if He was also thinking about the poem, *Song of Solomon*, a further celebration of the ideals to which Jesus referred. I have no doubt that when the erotic *Song of Solomon* was read in the temple, many an imagination took flight. Along with subtle descriptions of sexuality, these chapters have joyfully explicit passages about rounded, full breasts.

In his reply, Jesus favoured one passage of Scripture over another. He was clear that the later passage allowing divorce was a necessary concession, but it was a step down from the ideal expressed in Genesis 1 and 2. Regrettably, it abandoned the romantic eroticism of *Song of Solomon*. Jesus was about to raise the bar higher than the Mosaic Law. "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." Then and only then the "one flesh" had ruptured. Then and only then, divorce was but confirmation of the rupture that had already taken place.

Silent, the Pharisees returned to Jerusalem. The crowd breathed a sigh of relief. However, physical healing was delayed a little longer. I imagine the looks on the faces of the disciples as they realized in shock that they agreed with the Pharisees. "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry!" From my perspective, the disciples thought what Jesus said seemed just too demanding! I think Jesus understood that his disciples were, at that moment, just as hardhearted as the Pharisees. They had suffered a blow to their sense of male entitlement. No wonder women were among Jesus' most fervent followers!

"...better not to marry!"

Jesus understood his disciples were men of their culture, relishing a healthy sex life, blessed by God that ideally resulted in many sons and daughters. It was

even the custom to consummate marriage while the wedding party waited. This was very earthy stuff! When Jesus reminded his hearers of the Eden account, there existed no verse to quote where God encouraged Adam by telling him, "I am sufficient for you." As perfect as God is, He felt it better for Adam to experience intimacy, love, and vulnerability with another human. "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it has been given."

Now that he had their attention, Jesus continued speaking:

"For some are eunuchs because they were born that way (from birth).

"Others were made that way by men (through violence).

"And others have renounced marriage 'because of the kingdom of Heaven' (in devotion).

"The one who can accept this should accept this."

Taken in a completely unexpected direction, the disciples of Jesus were baffled. To whom had this teaching already been given and by whom understood? In the ultimate sense, it referred to Jesus himself. Jesus identified fully with the third group. While he understood their desire and longing, he was not to share in it. For the sake of Heaven, Jesus voluntarily became a "eunuch." Even though it was given to the first Adam to find fulfilment in another human, it was only to Jesus that God declared, "I am sufficient for you." The Second Adam was not to receive the gift received in joy by the First Adam. Jesus fulfilled his need by devoting whole nights in prayer.

Another person in the third group was Paul. Even though his advice ran contrary to the Eden ideal, Paul recommended that if people could receive it, they, like him, should remain unmarried (I Corinthians 7:1-7). Paul devoted his life to preaching to the Gentiles, never seeking and never finding the kind of sexual/relationship fulfilment I believe was desired by the disciples. Paul's was a life of sexual privation and denial, devoted to the community-based relationships and the gospel.

The second group of "eunuchs" portrayed by Jesus include those who had been castrated, often after defeat in battle. They are "eunuchs" through violence, through no choice of their own. These men may marry but will never sire children.

The first group of "eunuchs" portrayed by Jesus were "born that way." Once again, they are "eunuchs" through no choice of their own. This group, I submit, included people who today are understood to be gay. Eunuchs, generically, were people who did not marry or reproduce. Homosexuals, when they were noted at all, were perceived as men who had little to no interest in women, did not reproduce, and so were included in the rubric of eunuchs. Gay people have always understood that they, contrary to societal expectations, do not feel towards the opposite sex the same attraction as did the disciples and most others. Based on their own witness, I submit they are included in the first group of "eunuchs."

It is interesting that both of the first two groups are "eunuchs" involuntarily. Only the third group are "eu-

nuchs" voluntarily and theirs is because of a deeply felt devotion to God.

Clearly, Jesus meant for them (and us) to accept, and have empathy for, all three groups in this class of people. This lesson was Jesus' remedy for their hard hearts. Jesus ached for them also to find fulfillment in human love, vulnerability, intimacy, and the joy of sexual unity that he intended for them from the beginning.

If the disciples felt the divorce rule was demanding, this further progression of thought was not making it any easier for them. From the days of Moses, eunuchs were excluded from the worship life of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:1). Only later did Isaiah encourage eunuchs to believe they would one day be included as fully integrated worshippers (Isaiah 56:4). Eunuchs were excluded from polite society because they were unable to reproduce; they were believed to be, somehow, not whole, vibrant men. In the culture of Israel, any man who did not have children was regarded as somehow less than a man, and a woman without children was believed to be cursed by God. Even if a eunuch wanted to marry, he was only permitted to marry a proselyte.

Clearly eunuchs were not contained within the Eden ideal, yet they did not receive one word of condemnation from Jesus.

By speaking of eunuchs, was Jesus changing the ideal? No. He'd said everything pertinent while the Pharisees were still there. Only hardheartedness had spoiled the Eden ideal, but Jesus' kingdom called everyone to have compassionate hearts. If Jesus' tone when speaking of eunuchs seems quite neutral, it is because he spoke about a broad spectrum of people. While the devotion of the third group (eunuchs for the Kingdom) is accepted and blessed, it is not set forth as the Eden ideal as Jesus has given it expression. Eden is encompassed in Genesis 1 and 2 plus the playful eroticism of *Song of Solomon*. None of these eunuch groups represented the Eden ideal, yet Jesus offered no condemnation of them. Rather, He challenges us to overcome our prejudices about them. Let this melt your hard hearts. Let these people who do not participate in your dream and who because of it are marginalized in Israel, help you to learn compassion.

From the beginning of the Christian movement, barriers against eunuchs began to fall. Philip baptized a eunuch who longed to follow Jesus. I wonder how Philip knew he was a eunuch. In ancient times it was likely not easy to distinguish the three groups from one another.



Picture from the movie *Eyes Wide Open*

As Jews, the disciples of Jesus must have wondered what distinguished homosexual "eunuchs" from the homosexual acts reviled in Leviticus 18:22? How could these men possibly receive acceptance? Were they not an abomination? No. There are two different words translated "abomination." The "forbidden food" type of abomination was one and it was different from the "man lying with a man" type of abomination. The latter type of abomination was most often used for things connected to idolatry and not to homosexuality generically. Writing about Leviticus, even the conservative, not gay-positive writer Robert Gagnon, almost reluctantly, writes, "I do not doubt that the circles out of which Leviticus 18:22 was produced had in view homosexual cult prostitution, at least partly. Homosexual cult prostitution appears to have been the primary form in which homosexual intercourse was practised in Israel."

To Jesus' words we read no response from the disciples. No sooner had the Pharisees departed than the disciples disappointed Jesus once again, to which Jesus retorted, no doubt disappointed, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. The one who can accept this should accept it" (Matt 19:14).

It should be heartening to my gay and lesbian family to know that Jesus pointed his disciples to "eunuchs" as an antidote to rampant feelings of male privilege. It is perhaps the only time that Jesus referred even obliquely to gay persons. ▼

***Quote from Robert A. J. Gagnon, "The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics" (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, page 130.**

John J. McNeill had put forth the same idea in a book which ultimately resulted in his expulsion from the Catholic priesthood. He said about Matthew 19:12: "The first category -- those eunuchs who have been so from birth -- is the closest description we have in the Bible of what we understand today as a homosexual." (John J. McNeill, The Church and the Homosexual, Fourth edition, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, p. 65. First edition: 1976.)



A String Too Short to Save

Rom Wilder

As I was packing my things to move last fall, I became painfully aware of the fondness I have for things. Could I give them all up? Sure, if I had to. There are things in a drawer that I haven't opened in months. Other than something for summer (which is the month of July here), if I haven't needed or even seen what's in that drawer for nearly half a year, do I really need it? And is *need* the condition that matters? If we only had things we need, wouldn't we be able to fit it all into an SUV?

I am happier and more content than I recall being at any time in my long life. None of this "stuff" is what makes me feel that way. I had this same stuff, and more of it, when I was not so happy or at all content. So if the stuff doesn't have anything to do with my happiness, if I don't really need it all and I don't have space for it, then why not just get rid of it? Off to a charitable thrift shop it will go, and three of us will be winners: the people who buy at very low prices the things I didn't need, the people who benefit from the money the thrift shop uses to help people who are in need, and, of course, I'll have won.



The Good (and Bad) News about Life-Changing Transitions

By Larry Hallock

For multitudes on this planet, transitions have been life-changing and painful. Moving separates us from friends and beloved family. The death of people or pets throws us to the wrenching cycles of grief. Neglectful, abusive, or even tired caregivers have left us pining for the basic needs of safety, food, and shelter. The first playground bully wakes us to confusing vulnerability. Too many of us have learned to see transitions as something to be feared.

Truth is, things don't have to be that gloomy. Life can also bring us an unexpected career opportunity, a near-perfect love, an unforgettable sunrise, a new home we will enjoy, puppies, remarkable new friends. Not all transitions are bad. With a little practice we might do well to spend more of our emotional energy anticipating the good ones, rather than dreading the bad ones. We have the ability to create our own pleasant, life-changing transitions. We can stop smoking, change careers, adopt a kid, or even make a life-changing commitment to live a more authentic life.

Wait! There's even more. Researchers at the University of Michigan bring us both good and bad news. How we handle unexpected transitions is really about happiness. It's not about the happiness centered on objects or power. That lasts only as long as we have them. It's about the other kind—our inner happiness. It turns out we are born with a degree of inner happiness. How we use it determines our degree of general contentment with the events we face in life. The good news is, when bad things happen, we rebound to where we were before. The bad news is, we'll also rebound to where we were before the good things happened.

A friend of mine lived for more than a decade believing with quite a sense of certainty that he was HIV positive. On the day he finally got the courage to be tested and found out he was negative, his whole life changed. He was filled with ecstatic, indescribable joy. Hold that thought.

Another friend of mine left an AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meeting one night and went out into the woods to pray. Through his drug-induced spiral to rock bottom, he believed countless earlier prayers had been unanswered. This night he prayed for two hours, and went home to bed noticing nothing out of the ordinary. Amazingly, when he woke the next morning, my friend realized everything had changed. He was a new man, transformed. He had a new lease on life. It was indescribably exhilarating. Hold that thought.

Writer Allan Hamilton¹ had a similar life-invigorating experience following the heartbreak of his cancer diagnosis and the long horrific treatment process. In his written account he colorfully articulates the horror of all of that, but then look what he says happens each time the test results come back negative:

I feel that heart-stopping grab—the enormous gut-wrenching swoop of salvation. I experience it as incredible, aching, penetrating euphoria. My sight suddenly seems to grow crystal clear, infinitely penetrating. Light seems to spill softly down, kissing every tree, branch, and leaf. Every blade of grass stands out, etched with purpose.



*Psyche revived by the kiss of Love. Marble, 1793
Antonio Canova (Italian, 1757–1822)*

Everything makes sense for a moment, like a puzzle pulled into some unified, magnetic message.

He remembers driving home after hearing that his last tests came back negative:

Everything crackled and danced in front of me. I was alive. Here and now was distinct from everything else. It was like I had been injected with a cocktail of amphetamine, aphrodisiac, hallucinogen, and sweet, essential nectar. The noise of the world became music. My car vibrated with meaning. As I ran my hand along my dog's back, his fur coat became infinitely deep and rich. My wife's skin glowed. I knew what it meant to be in God's bosom.

And then it would fade.

In a few hours—at most, a few days—the high would be gone. How could that be, I wondered? Insight, awareness, enlightenment couldn't just wear off like a drug. But that is exactly what happened. Each time the battery of tests would roll around again, I would find myself transported. I would want to hold on to the magic of that moment but, hard as I might try, I could not grasp it for long.

That's exactly what happened to my friend who got the negative HIV test and my friend who enjoyed several days of euphoria after his prayer session in the woods. In both cases, they thought their life had changed forever. It didn't last. The University of Michigan researchers found this also happens to lottery winners. At first it's ecstasy. But then they rebound to where they were before.

Most of us have had a personal experience with limerance, another word for infatuation. Our culture's greatest hits in music, poetry, and painting are often created during those wonderful windows of euphoria that we experience when "falling in love." But, sooner or later, it's always back to business as usual.

So, what's the good news? The university researchers also studied negative transitions, such as having a car accident and becoming a paraplegic who is confined to a wheelchair for the rest of their life. This "springing back" effect works the same, only in the opposite direction. We return to where we were before in terms of our usual level of happiness and sense of well-being.

How happy we feel (referring to the deep-seated kind of happiness), and hence how we rebound from the impact of unexpected, life-changing transitions, be they good or bad, seems to have a significant genetic component.

I think this means two things. Most of us have already learned that limerance isn't love; and, unlike love, it never lasts. Those who haven't learned that distinction can go for years, moving from one broken relationship to another, wondering why "love" never lasts. Whether it's a new limerance or some other good fortune that comes our way, we do well to understand the elusive nature of our immediate euphoria. We can milk it for all it's worth but with no illusions, no let-downs. Just because we're enjoying a glorious day in the park doesn't mean we've moved there.

Conversely, we can know with confidence that, while the mechanics of our life-altering misfortunes may be here to stay, our blue funk is not. Like euphoria, depression too will fade. We will be ourselves again. Isn't that a good thing to know up front? Our happiness will rebound to the level we had before, proving that time does indeed heal all wounds.

Sometimes we don't want our worst blue funks to go away. Maybe we feel we honor the memory of a loved one if we don't recover our happiness too soon. What I hope to be able to tell myself the next time tragedy strikes, be it a death or something less extreme, is, "Feel free to get over it. Not too soon, but not too late, either. Accept the sustenance of knowing you can and will recover. Grieve as you must, but keep an eye out for when you can seize the day and take back the joy." ▼

¹⁾To read Allan Hamilton directly, Google his name with "7 ways to make happiness last."

Building Care in a Chronologically Gifted Life

✉ Virginia (Ren) Reynolds

I have recently needed to change most of my caregivers. I kept the person who is the foundation of my team. She will work with all the others. My niece and nephew brought about a miracle of change by introducing a new team member who is an advocate for those of us using caregivers. I had not known she existed. I am so happy! This is going to be a wonderful change when it gets to working at full blast. In one day I have already seen many positive changes. My new advocate sees needs and immediately begins to find ways to fill them. I am paying a little bit more money but I am getting a lot better care. All good so far! ▼



✉ Anonymous

I just saw the film and mentioned to Stephen that "I stand a couple inches taller now:" religiously, as a man, and as a gay man. Being able to see my life's "struggles" articulated by others helped me better understand and validate myself. Over the years I have had a few serious relationships with men, and deep down would always get to this point of saying to myself, "This is against my religion. Maybe I'm not gay!" Shortly thereafter, I would find myself single.

I am Godsmacked. Even though I have witnessed it with my own eyes, it is hard to believe that Seventh-day Adventist churches screen this film. This is heart-warming. I see change on the horizon. Months ago my mother texted me to tell me that she and my father were headed to a screening of "Seventh-Gay Adventists." After determining she did not misspell the title, my next text was, "Where at?"

"At the church," she said.

"I know, it's about gay Seventh-day Adventists, but where are you seeing it?" I texted back. Her reply, "At the church."

With growing skepticism, I thought, "It's just another one of those 'hate the sin, love the sinner' propaganda stories."

It took my married, heterosexual brother taking me to a La Sierra screening to realize how heartwarming it is to see this film in church. It had been 12 years since I last walked into a Seventh-day Adventist church, on the Sabbath, and met those same warm smiles I remember growing up. My favorite moment in the film was, "I won't let this come between us." ▼

Pressing the Reset Button

By David Coltheart



We regularly press the reset button on our computers. Few of us get the chance to press the reset button on our lives—to start again, often from scratch, as the result of our own choice. I have had that opportunity twice in my life.

I was a naïve and closeted 23-year-old the first time.

Brought up in a sheltered home as the son of well-known evangelist, I was also the product of an Adventist education. I had just graduated with my theology degree from Newbold College and almost completed a post-graduate degree from Andrews University. Although we were originally from Australia, I had lived with my parents in the UK for ten years. My father was the ministerial secretary of what was then the Northern European West African Division of Seventh-day Adventists. With only a couple of months left to finish my education, I thought my life was mapped out ahead of me. I had already accepted a call to pastoral evangelistic work in the North England Conference, and I saw my future in that country. With only distant childhood memories of Australia, I now looked forward to settling down in the UK for life.

All that changed when I was informed that my dad had unexpectedly passed away at the age of 49. I flew home for the funeral, where my mother told me that she wanted to return to Australia as soon as possible. Without hesitation, I replied that I would go back with her and help her settle in. It was the hinge of my life up to that time. In one sentence, my future changed completely. I declined my call to ministerial work in North England and instead applied to Australia. Within a week, I had a call to Sydney, which is where my mum wanted to settle down.

I started work in a new, somewhat alien, country. I had to adapt to a new culture, a different style of work, and unfamiliar territory. The friends of school and college disappeared and I had to make new friends. As a result, a whole chain of events followed—marriage, in-laws, family, work, and life-style—thirty years of life, every part of which was completely different from the original plan.

The second reset button was more within my control. Like many readers of the *Connection*, I hid my identity for decades, aware of realities in my life too terrible to talk about. I looked everywhere for someone to talk to but found no one I could trust. What made talking about it so difficult was the thought that to even breathe a word of my problem would mean crossing a bridge over which there was no way back. Self-acceptance came slowly and, for me, quite late. I was 50 before I could look in the mirror and acknowledge something that I had known but resisted ever since I was a teenager.

This time, there seemed no way to press the reset button; I knew to do so would mean losing my job, my family, my house—my very existence. But, as the years went by, the pressure became relentless. Matters reached a turning point after sneaking out to the movies to see *Brokeback Mountain*. I identified powerfully with the characters in the movie and saw my pain reflected in the poignant story. I emerged from the movie realizing that something in me had snapped.



I pressed the reset button six months later when I came out to my family, friends, and church. I felt as if the weight of the world had rolled off my shoulders. True to my expectations, I lost everything. Eventually I packed up my few possessions and drove 1,000 km north, not knowing what would happen. Unemployed for six months and homeless for three of them, I felt that I was falling down a deep pit; I prayed that someone would be at the bottom to catch me before I hit the bottom. All direction in my life just stopped, and the future seemed to be a black abyss.

And then the miracles happened. I believe all of them were answers to prayer. I was offered a good-paying job, moved into a rented apartment, and met my future partner all within a few days. That same week I visited a new church plant for the first time after they advertised a free lunch after the service. Six years later, I am still there, working alongside the most loving and accepting church that anyone could find. Within months, I had bonded with work colleagues and connected with a wonderful network of gay friends. As I got to know John, we developed a deep love for each other that culminated in a commitment ceremony attended by family and friends. Now we live in a home that we own and is only a few kilometers from the beach. We are surrounded by forest and yet we are only three minutes from my workplace. I see answers to my prayers on a daily basis, and my faith is stronger than ever.

It has been often said that “it gets better” and, for many of us, life does get better after starting again. However, I realize that for some, pressing a reset button can be disastrous. My “happy-ever-after” ending isn’t everyone’s story; and you may be one who is hurting, desperately, right now. All I can say is for me, at least, pressing the reset button worked. I have always had a strong faith in God and I am an optimistic person by nature. I determined that my desperate situation was not going to get the better of me and that I was going to remain in control of my life. I found the answer by reconciling my faith with my identity and choosing to live in harmony with my beliefs and sexuality. Being transparent and open about both sides of life made all the difference.

I believe that if we exhibit integrity and faith, accepting who we really are and choosing to live life to

the full, then transitions can be opportunities. You may find those unbounded experiences suddenly become a reality. If you need to press the reset button, first accept yourself. Find someone to talk to and choose to live a life of honesty. And then, if the time is right, press the reset button and see what happens. You never know—you may be starting the greatest adventure of your life!

I’m still not totally comfortable with the second part of this article attributed to David, because it does not have anything to do with a reset button! He talks about life events that I wonder are consistent with the events he has revealed in the first part of his story. Like traveling to Japan, teaching language, getting a master’s degree in counseling, and working for the federal government. I also don’t remember him ever talking about having cancer—but maybe those are parts of his life when he has married and he just hasn’t talked about them before. Just expressing my opinion, not asking you to do anything in particular.

Faith, like most aspects of life, is always evolving. I believe that is a good thing despite the uneasiness it can create. There will always be those ups and downs. Sometimes we may feel our choices conflict with what we think being faithful should look like. During my times of uncertainty or confusion, I have learned to rely on the advice God gave Israel through the prophet Samuel. In the form of a plea, God implored that Israel not abandon God, for that would be futility (I Samuel 12:21).



David and his partner John

Health is another area that has thrown challenges my way. In my early thirties, I was diagnosed with cancer. I went from diagnosis to surgery in two weeks. While the prognosis was good, I was left with many unknowns. At the time, I had been making plans to quit my job, move to another city, and go back to school. During the weeks of recovery, I often wondered what to do with those plans? I decided I would do everything I needed to do to heal and take care of things in the moment, leave the unknowns with God, and continue ►

Pressing the Reset Button

► with my future plans. My cancer was beaten, and I continued with my plans. I learned that, although life throws the unexpected at us, we must adapt and keep working toward our hopes and dreams.

Moving from place to place used to be the norm. From the time I left home at age 15 to the present, I must have moved 20 times. I moved a number of times for studies, and I crossed the Pacific five times to live and work in Japan. I spent time in many cities in Canada and the U.S.A. Moves are exciting but also challenging. There are new living arrangements, new people, new church communities, new foods, new customs, and even new weather. What did all this teach me? Don't make a decision about liking or not liking the "new" for at least six months and not before you have put a lot of effort into trying to settle in. Experiment, get involved, be flexible, and expect the unexpected.

Finding a career often requires many transitions. I did not end up in the career I had set out for, but everything I did along the way set me up for opportunities and choices that would become a part of my successes. The most valuable course I ever took was typing! Add to that my language teaching experience and then a master's in counseling a few years later, and it would all take me to a job for the federal government. Who would have thought! All of my skills and experiences seem unrelated, but they all became part of the bridge that brought me to a place I now find meaningful.

Most people want a relationship, but relationships mean constant transition despite how comfortable and routine they may become. Over time you and your partner change. The unexpected is also a part of a relationship. Set out to expect transition and go with it. As often as possible practice what I call the dinner-guest rule. With dinner guests, we easily forgive the little annoyances and idiosyncrasies! With dinner guests, our most patient and tolerant selves are out front. I think we need to regularly extend that to those closest to us, with the hope they will do the same.

God is good! I thank Him for his unmeasured blessings. ▼

**The opposite of love is not hate
but indifference.**

—Elie Wiesel



THE PERKS OF BEING A MERMAID

Elvys Pereira

Last week I was watching a documentary about a lovely eleven-year-old girl named Jazz. Like many pre-teens in the United States, she hangs out with her best friends, goes shopping, is a good student, sings in the chorus, and even plays football in the girls' league. By her own description, she's a bit short but very quick on the field. Only one thing differentiates from her local peers: Jazz was born a biological boy.

Her life has been on the TV a couple of times. I find it inspiring. For me, transgender people have some of the most touching life stories we find in the media about gender and sexual diversities.

Jazz's biggest fear, puberty, is just around the corner. This particular transition is one of the most significant we humans experience.

Here is where the concept of mermaids comes up for me. At her age it's very complicated to begin a hormone-based treatment. The current medical professionals haven't decided what to do with transgender kids younger than 16. Imagine how disturbing it is to feel out of your body or even in someone else's body, all because you have a penis. That doesn't happen to the beautiful creatures that are half human, half fish. Since "mermaids" have a tail instead of a vagina or a penis, they have been an inspiration to trans-people as they work to overcome issues with their genitalia.

I hope it will be only a matter of time before we all can realize how special we are, despite how the world sees us. We don't need to be short, to swim well, or even to have a crab as our best friend, like the Little Mermaid. We are special with or without a tail. God knows why some of us have been born the way we are. I do know it is important that we make the most of life, just like Jazz. Even if our families and friends can't understand us, there will be a crowd out there in the world just waiting to embrace us and help us survive our transitions. For me it is called Kinship. Practice loving yourself. Find support. You deserve it.

If you are interested in learning more about her story, google "I am Jazz." Share the links. I am interested in hearing from you. You can always find me on Facebook. Thank you for your support. I love you. ▼



Baby-Step Transitions

By Andrew Dykstra and Ben Kemena

Hello everyone, I just got a phone call from the woman who is elder of my Toronto-based Seventh-day Adventist church. I had invited her to the November screening of *Seventh-Gay Adventists*. I wasn't sure why she was calling, so we chatted nicely for a while. Then she mentioned the screening and asked me some questions about the film. I told her that there would be another screening, sponsored by the University of Toronto, but her schedule will not allow her to make it. She asked me my opinion on same-sex marriage. Following the "if they don't want to know they won't ask" principle, I told her. She told me she believed in sex inside of marriage. I told her, perhaps to her shock, I agreed. I went on to tell her that heterosexual young people can bide their time knowing they will find fulfillment when they marry because they *can* marry. "What option do we leave to our gay and lesbian members?" I asked her. No answer. I went on to say that the biggest impediment to understanding this conundrum is the belief that homosexuality is a choice. That's my bottom line.

The church elder went on to say (despite my first-hand witness!) that she thought some women choose to be lesbians because they have had a bad experience with men. She also said gay people seem to be too focused on sex. I replied that perhaps those who do not over-emphasize sex simply have not confided in her. (She must not imagine she has spoken to an exhaustive spectrum of gay folk.)

She says that her lesbian friend claims that she has prayed for years to be changed, but it has not happened. My elder wanted to know whether this woman had fasted and prayed and stayed on her knees until God agreed to change her. *Honestly! What's the matter with God? Why do I have to twist His arm to make me straight? If this is His will, why doesn't He get busy! Why does He focus on my pride, my impatience, my intemperance instead? Why is my elder blaming us for not trying hard enough?* She quickly retreated into an admission that she cannot be judge of just how much a person has fasted/prayed/begged/pleaded/wrestled with God. Nor will I tolerate it.

I told her that a friend of mine once had cancer.

Can God cure cancer? Of course. If my friend had been placed in his grave, would we judge at the graveside that "he really didn't pray hard enough"? Of course not! It would be contemptible!

I told her there were many stories of miracles, even miraculous healing. Those are often about tumors that disappear. But if someone loses a limb, God can still heal, but do we hear about limbs that have been completely replaced? Never. God can do anything; but He does not always do what we ask, even if we feel those things are in our best interest.

Now I am completely out to my elder and I must confess that I am shaking a little. I'm quite sure she means no harm, but the whole experience is a more than a little nerve-wracking. It is difficult for me to contain my anger. To my impatient mind, to be ignorant these days is a willing ignorance. Perhaps I am being judgmental. I hold Adventism to a higher standard, not because we are somehow better, but because of our emphasis on education. What possible excuse can we have to be ignorant on such an important subject?

Thanks for listening to my rant.

Andrew

Dear Andrew, This is how hearts are changed—by both sides taking risks.

The harsh tone of the 1999 Adventist church policy on homosexuality remains fully enforced and intact. There are two central tenets to that policy. First, that the notion of "sexual orientation" is neither recognized nor countenanced by institutional church leadership. The term was included in the original policy statement draft, but withdrawn because the church did not want to edify the term in policy statements. Second, that there can be "no accommodation" for homosexual relationships (including platonic friendship) nor homosexual activities (anything beyond a handshake is forbidden).

While I cannot fully know the motives for why your church elder reached out to you, she did something rather daring. She fully entered the borderlands of heresy by having such a discussion with you. After all, the



official church position is that there is no such thing as sexual orientation—we are all born “straight” and a sizable minority chooses to sin and earns hell in the process. She was willing to look past that to engage you in a challenging conversation. She may know better and she may know more, but she is also trying to stay within the fellowship of the church.

I’m proud of your daring response and engagement with her. I hope the consequences are nil. In my view, they should be. You were able to see past her archaic language and outdated bigotry that simply equates gay Adventists defined only by sex acts. Good for your thoughtful reply. Many of “our tribe” would find her so offensive that it would be easy to walk away (or curse). You stayed the course and did all of us proud by providing education and love. Whether she understands your kindness as such is uncertain, but I’m very proud of your example. And I want to say this to you: Thank you!

I have lived long enough to have had many “closed door” conversations with Adventist leaders around the issues of sexual orientation. The initial rhetoric can be so offensive that I just want to leave. Yet I know they have come to talk with me for a reason. These leaders often approach me filled with old church canards and teachings they don’t even understand. They have never reviewed the science, biblical teachings, or the sociology of our lives and situation. They are quick to judge and are unabashedly judgmental, at least in the beginning. Even so, I know that they have come to talk with me (or you) for a reason. I may not understand their reasons at first; and, frankly, it’s not necessarily my business. Many are struggling with a gay relative or a gay spouse. Some are struggling with the guilt of grossly mistreating a gay person in their midst and their conscience is in turmoil. Some are grappling with their own sexual orientation issues. They are coming to talk with us for a reason. Adventists struggling with this issue, no matter how clumsily at first, can often become our best friends and allies over time.

If Adventists were wholly bad and evil as a group and denomination, it would be easy to leave them without looking back. You and I both know this is not the case! Most Adventists are good people trying to find their way in an exceedingly complex world. They are doing their best to stay connected to their institutional church and to the message of the Gospels. Sometimes these are concordant. For instance, I’m proud of the fact that Adventism formally organized as a church group in 1861 because they wanted an institutional voice to condemn slavery in the United States. On the other hand, I’m not so proud of some of their previously held positions regarding women, race relations, and sexual orientation (even if the term can’t be uttered yet in official church meetings). No church and no denomination is perfect. Where there has been discordance, I believe the tide of history rooted in the message of the Gospels eventually does and has transformed the Adventist church. I may not see that transformation in my lifetime, but I rest in knowing that this tide is un-

stoppable.

For until every nation, kindred, tongue, and people have heard their potential for full inclusion within the loving Word of God, there can be no Second Coming. Deep in their hearts, many Adventists know that their position on sexual orientation cannot be reconciled to a loving Savior. They want to remain loyal to tradition and church institution. However, their greater loyalty to the message of Jesus is a shared promise to one another, gay or straight. Jesus really does love us, without exception and without asterisk. We are learning and growing and striving to become better Christians. While this struggle and controversy goes on, many will still be caught and hurt in the crossfire. It is the price of change and transition. It is our role to educate and affirm. But, it is also our role to protect and love those that are vulnerable, particularly our young people as they come to terms with sexual orientation as Adventists. Your example shows that living these roles are not for the faint of heart. We don’t simply throw our church in the garbage can. On the other hand, we don’t have to say another lie for Jesus, a Savior who already knows who we are and why. The issue is being part of that gentle loving reconciliation.

Andrew, stop shaking and let me hug you. Thank you. THANK YOU!

Ben ▼

Kinship Europe Holiday Week September 2-9, 2013



For information and
registration:

kinshipeurope@sdakinship.org



Healthtips of the Month

News that a daily diet of just 3 ounces of processed or red meat boosts your risk for early death by as much as 20% has left even part-time carnivores wondering what's for dinner—and if they should convert to a vegetarian diet to lower their risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

This isn't the first time red meat and the stuff that gets brined, cured, and processed (sausage, ham, and most lunch meats fall into this category) have been linked with heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and shorter lifespan. In 2009, evidence suggested that a burger a day boosts risk for fatal heart disease and cancer by up to 30%. That report, from Harvard, is notable because it followed more than 120,000 men and women for 20 years, tracking their diets and their health.



Good news! "No meat" doesn't mean you have to give up all the things that make beef, bologna, and brats so darn tempting. We have a meat lover's way to fill that space on your plate with tasty, healthy, protein-packed foods so satisfying, so full of flavor, and so grillable that you'll never miss those old-fashioned burgers and hot dogs again! Here's how to eat less red meat without sacrificing flavor:

- **Grill something new.** Fire up your grill and lay out beefy-tasting veggie burgers—yes, veggie burgers. We're big fans of many types of veggie burgers, from spicy to barbecue to classic. Dr. Mike once had a veggie burger "taste off" of more than 20 different brands at his house.

- **Opt for low-fat, low-sodium tofu dogs instead of traditional hot dogs.** Pair with sauerkraut on a 100% whole-wheat bun and top with a thin ribbon of yellow mustard, which contains brain-healing turmeric. Heterocyclic amines, nasty compounds that form when meat is cooked at high temperatures, are linked to many cancers, including colon cancer, breast cancer, stomach cancer, pancreatic cancer, and prostate cancer.

- **Skip the beef and eat more beans.** In your favorite soups, stews, and casseroles, use mild black beans; big, creamy kidney beans; and/or white cannellini beans. Beans are excellent meat substitutes because they're high in protein and filling fiber, and ultra low in fat. (Meat contains high levels of saturated fat, which can turn on inflammation-triggering genes, increase skin wrinkles, decrease sex drive, increase LDL cholesterol—as well as your waist size—and make



blood sugar control harder. The calorie trade-offs are another plus. You'd have to eat more than 4 cups of black beans—and that's not going to happen—to match the calorie count of one 10 oz. rib eye steak (860)! One cup of black beans delivers just 190 calories along with 14 to 20 grams of protein and nearly 20 grams of cholesterol-lowering, inflammation-soothing, heart-smart fiber.

- **Don't give up "umami."** *U what?* Umami is a naturally occurring glutamate that delivers the subtle, savory taste of beef. It turns out plenty of other good-for-you foods tickle your taste buds in the same way. Foods with big umami impact include mushrooms, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and even carrots. Grill big *portobello* (portabella) mushrooms or sauté some shitake mushrooms to add to scrambled eggs. In one study, people who ate mushroom-based dishes instead of meat-based ones consumed 420 fewer calories, and in a blind taste test said the food tasted even better and left them feeling just as full for just as long.

Who says you need beef for great taste? Not us! ▼



**European Kinship Meeting '13
Lisboa, Portugal,
August 29 – September 2**

For information and registration:

kinshipeurope@sdakinship.org



Save the Date!

The U.S. Kinship Kampmeeting 2013 is scheduled for July 2-7, 2013, at the Asilomar Conference Center in Pacific Grove, California. You won't want to miss the opportunity to vacation and fellowship on the beautiful Pacific Coast, so start planning now by blocking this week off on your 2013 calendar.

Kampmeeting is a time for Kinship members to celebrate and embrace other members from a broad range of spiritual and social experiences. If you *haven't* yet attended a Kampmeeting, 2013 will be a good year to discover Kinship through our biggest annual event. If you *have* been to a Kampmeeting in the past, you already know what a diverse and fulfilling experience Kampmeeting can be—music, friends, family, networking, sharing, absorbing, laughter, fun, learning, growing, celebrating, and oh, did I mention music! —it's all found at Kampmeeting!

Register before May 1 to get the **EARLY BIRD RATES!** After May 1 the cost goes up 10%!! And remember, *Women and Children First* weekend will precede Kampmeeting.

Rehoboth Beach **April 25-28** Mini-Kampmeeting

April at the ocean! East-coast board walks! Mitch Tyner for a weekend speaker! Our wonderful beach house, filled with friendly people, comfortable places to sit or sleep, and delicious food! This event is always one of the highlights of the Kinship calendar. If you would like to attend, please feel most welcome to register at www.sdakinship.org. Click on the "Events" link. We look forward to seeing you there! ▼



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