

Connection

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 39, No. 5, August 2015



DISCRIMINATION AND EQUALITY

*Being a
Two-mother
Family*



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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.



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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. (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

I am one of those people who notices if someone shifts their facial expression in a nuanced inch—but not the demolition of a building complex on my way to work. Because I am immersed in many Kinship projects, you might think I notice the shifts in our community as they develop. Nope. It is the last two Kampmeetings that finally opened my perceptual eyes to see some huge demographic changes.

The first Kinship Kampmeeting was a small, motivated, primarily male group who began a conversation with their Seventh-day Adventist teachers and administrators. They identified themselves as "gay." They were in their 20s and 30s. They were generally without disabilities. They were a brave group in the 1970s with a glacially conservative church.

This year a cluster of children (ages 4-17) and their adult collaborators occupied an entire, craft-filled, back corner of our meeting room. College students attended; people in their seventies joined them. At the first Kampmeeting straight attendees got permission from their Adventist administrators to join the conversation. This year one of our speakers and his wife chose to risk their ministry and family income to "come out" as allies, preaching a gospel of radical acceptance. They are not alone. At the first Kampmeetings we wondered how to reach the colleges. At this one IAGC (page 14) talked about their work on 9 North American campuses. At our first Kampmeetings we identified as gay or lesbian. At this one we had gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, cis gender, straight, questioning, and "fluid" participants. Bless the millennials, they are expanding our vocabulary—and our understanding of diversity (and pronouns). We had people of differing abilities. You will notice our colourful community in the photos over the next couple of issues.

One of the phrases we have heard and discussed is "there is room at the table." To me, that means whoever you are, however you define yourself, whatever your journey has been, there is room to be nurtured at the table of this community. We ask you to be respectful, non-judgmental, and willing to learn. We ask you to listen carefully to our stories as we tell them. We ask you to be patient with us as we grow and learn about you. We are stronger because of every single one of you. For both selfish and unselfish reasons, this is what we ask you to take good care of yourself for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



▼ A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral.▲

-Antoine de Saint-Exupery,
author and aviator (1900-1944)

Kampmeeting 2015



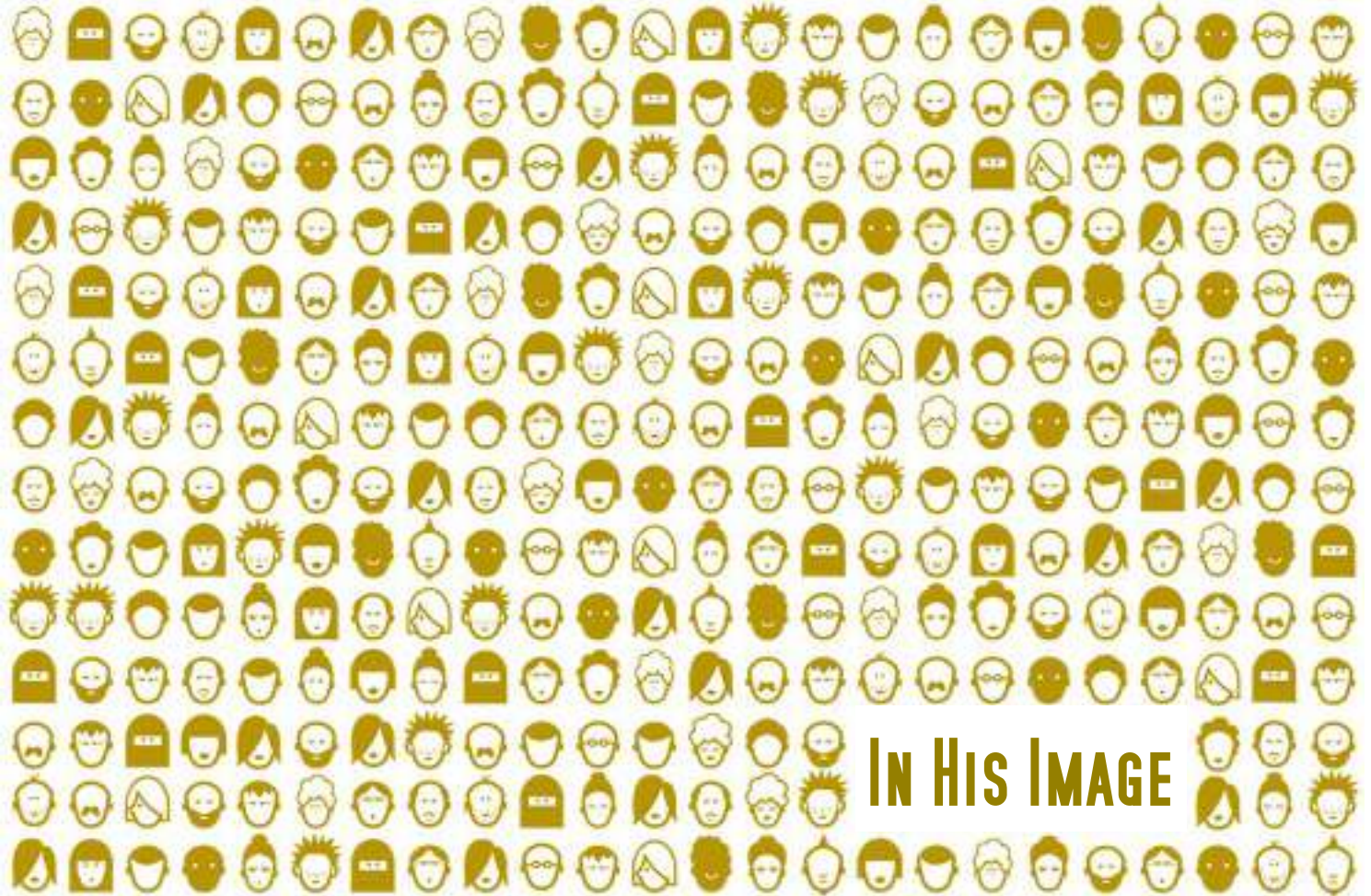
Denise and Kristina



▲ Herb

Jacquie ▼





IN HIS IMAGE DISCRIMINATION AND EQUALITY



By Tom De Bruin

Almost 25 years ago Nelson Mandela was released from prison. He has been an inspiration for many people, and I am sure he will remain one for generations. In 1993 his contribution to society was honored when he won the Nobel Prize for peace, together with F.W. de Klerk. Mandela's mission was founded in love and human rights.

Mandela's fight for love and human rights is special to me. I lived in South Africa when he was released from prison. I remember the elections where De Klerk was voted president. I remember the hope that many had that he, from a position of power, would bring change. And change was direly needed.

BORDERS

I grew up in a country of borders. Everything in my life revolved around borders. There were borders to show you who you could play with and where you were allowed to be. There were even borders to show you which restroom you could use and if you could sit on the benches in the park. I was on the "right" side of the border—as far as that is possible, of course. I am white, so I could use the whites-only restrooms. I could sit on the benches, and I could live in the nice neighborhoods. If I had been born with a different skin color, my life would have been very different.

I grew up in a country of racism and discrimination. Just because you were a little different, because you were on the other side of some random border, you didn't belong.

Last year I went to South Africa with my wife. I saw some improvement—things look a lot better now. But my wife, having never seen how it was before, was very shocked.

HOLLAND

As the Dutch (or any other country, I am sure) we look at these atrocities in South Africa and we agree that it is idiocy. But, if we are really honest, is it better here? It seems to me that, in Europe and even in "tolerant" Holland, it's getting worse and worse by the day. And I'm not just referring to extreme right-wing politicians. Certain football players are called monkeys on Facebook—and let's not even repeat what people are calling Muslims.

I see this even in the church. There is racism and discrimination in the local churches and at national events, not to mention the limitations for women and homosexuals set out in policy that seems very much like discrimination.

I can't really say anything about this, except that it is not the way it should be. Western civilization should not include discrimination, and Christianity *certainly* should not. Jesus taught us to look past borders. He spoke to women, who men were not really allowed to talk to in public. He ate with tax collectors: traitors to their country. He converted Samaritans: foreigners that were best ignored. He let the children come to him: the invisibles with even less status than slaves. Even the lepers and criminals, the lowest of the low, were welcome in Jesus' eyes. Jesus had time for them all. Jesus taught us to look beyond borders.

DIVINE BORDERS

Now, God is clearly a God of borders—certain borders, anyway. At creation he created borders between light and dark, between wet and dry. The first humans showed us the border between good and evil. These are borders that belong with God, but there are other borders that God does *not* like. I would call these borders “borders between people.”

Borders between people are the hot topic in the church right now. In most countries we have been discussing the ordination of women, LGBTI individuals, and the right to discriminate. Can we have a border between men and women in pastoral ministry? Can we have a border between straight and gay in visiting and joining the church? Do we have the right to discriminate based purely on the way we currently understand the Bible? These are difficult questions without easy answers, but let's look at them one by one.

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

The church has been struggling with female pastors for longer than I have been alive. At the moment female pastors are accepted in some form in most countries in the world, but are given a lower status. Male pastors are ordained and can perform all the functions associated with that calling. Female pastors are commissioned and perform most functions. The biggest issue with the status quo is that a woman cannot become conference or union presidents. In 2013, the Dutch church chose to introduce complete equality between genders. Sadly, the General Conference just this week decided to maintain inequality.

This is a huge discussion worldwide. Hundreds of articles and books appeared in the last few years on this topic. My division, the Trans-European Division, wrote a 863 page report—comprehensive but way too long for most people. The Division asked me to write a shorter version.

SOME THEOLOGY

The ordination of woman is a complicated theological topic. The fact that there are no pastors in the Bible doesn't help matters. Now we have to argue from texts that are only vaguely comparable to our situation. Clearly pastors cannot be compared to the priests in the Old Testament; Jesus is the only high priest now. So that only really leaves the New Testament.

There is no doubt that women played a role in the New Tes-

tament. And there is no doubt that this role is less apparent than that of the men. But the question that remains is “Why?” We could argue that that was God's intention: women should not have positions of leadership in the church, or at least have ones of lower status than the men. I don't believe that this is the correct answer. Let me tell you why.

SIMPLE EQUALITY

Let's start simple: the Bible is very explicit that it stands for equality. Galatians 3 is quite clear: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). This is hard to misunderstand; in the church certain borders play no role.

Paul names three borders in this verse: race or nationality, social standing, and gender. As far as Paul is concerned something special happens at baptism. Suddenly you are no longer white or of color, no longer Dutch or American; you are a Christian. You are no longer a white-collar or blue-collar worker; you are a Christian. You are no longer male or female; you are a Christian. Discrimination has no place in the church.

COMPLICATED EQUALITY

The Bible is a complicated book, both divine and human. On the one side we have the Spirit inspiring people, on the other side we have authors, who, no matter what, remain human. If we look closely, it seems as if God, despite the human authors, is trying to tell us to be inclusive and emphasize equality. The Old Testament culture was very male-oriented. Women played almost no important role, and definitely could not have a leadership role. Despite this God kept calling women. Why? God names Miriam one of the three leaders of the Israelites (Numbers 12:4-8, Micah 6:4). He calls Deborah to be a prophet, a judge, and even a military commander (Judges 4:4-23). I am sure that the people then didn't appreciate this.

The culture in the New Testament was not much different. Despite the culture, Jesus chose women to be the first witnesses to his resurrection (Luke 24:6-7). And it was Martha who first recognizes Jesus as the Son of God (John 11:27). Paul talks about many women, and even calls them apostles (Romans 16:2, 7, amongst others).

It seems to me that God, despite all the cultural difficulties, insists on calling women. This statement is not immediately apparent, and of course there are enough texts that suggest inequality between men and women. But a patient Bible student will see the divine message between the discriminating, cultural words of humans. A message of equality.

For many people this is very clear, others trip up over some passages. And how could it be any different; culture will always play a role.

LGBTI RIGHTS

When I wrote this article in Dutch, it was about the *International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia*, which we celebrate on the 17th of May each year. This year was the 25th anniversary of the World Health Organization's removal of homosexuality from their list of diseases. That day, 25 years ago,

was a great victory for the many people fighting for human rights.

Last year the General Conference organized a conference on sexualities in South Africa. I was invited to be there. When I was there, I was reminded of the role that South Africa and Mandela played in the fight for gay rights. It was like South Africa, after the horrors of apartheid, wanted to make sure that all discrimination was unconstitutional. In 1993 they outlawed discrimination on basis of sexual orientation in their constitution, and they were one of the first to allow same-sex marriage.

One of the first people to speak at the conference in South Africa was the local conference president. He discussed South Africa's terrible past and was proud of the fact that all rights of all people are safe in the new South Africa. Sadly, it did not take long before there were panels discussing our right to discriminate.



THE RIGHT TO DISCRIMINATE

A large amount of people in our church defend our right to discriminate. The idea is simple: imagine you have a hotel, can you refuse a gay couple? Or a bakery, can you refuse to bake a marriage cake on account of your religion?

This is a complicated issue. Many people's gut says that "all discrimination is wrong." But at the same time discrimination is very much part of how we do church. So while a hotel room might be open to gay couples, the baptismal water is not. And even if the couple gets a wedding cake, they won't be eating it after their marriage in church. As a church we are used to discrimination; we just don't always notice.

But the question remains: when can we discriminate? Is it always wrong? Could we bake cakes, but not baptize? Can we do both?

It might be the South African in me, but as far as I am concerned discrimination is always wrong. I don't care if it's about the color of your hair or your skin, your gender, your sexual orientation or your favorite color. Discrimination is wrong, all the time. And that is why it's so important to remember Paul: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Every time we discriminate, no matter the cause, we destroy this unity, this equality. But there's more than that.

THOSE THAT CANNOT SPEAK

You may never have thought of it like this, but discrimination always goes one way—from the people with power towards the people without it. The whites were in power in South Africa, and discriminated against the rest. The Europeans were in power in the 16th to 19th centuries and discriminated against the colonies. Men are in power in the church and discriminate against the women.

We see the abuse of power everywhere. The people that are least equipped to protect themselves are the ones that are pushed around the most. On this issue the Bible is very clear. I could name a hundred verses, but I'll just name one: "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute" (Proverbs 31:8).

God's ideal is that Christians speak for those who cannot speak. Christians should fight against cultural trends and work for the destitute. As far as God is concerned, we should be standing up for those we would normally be expected to discriminate against.

All in all, it's very simple. God created all people. He just wants us to see each other in his image. ▼

Tom de Bruin is Youth and Communications Director for the Netherlands Union Conference. This article was originally published on his website: www.tomdebruin.com.

German Kinship Meeting



By Stefan Petruska

Joachim and I were very happy that we were able to attend the most recent German Kinship meeting, held in Leichlingen near Cologne on June 27. We had ideal weather with a lot of sun and temperatures between 25° and 27° C. We got to see old friends, some of them for the first time in ten years. We also enjoyed meeting new members. We made sure to get phone numbers and addresses so we can stay in contact. We spent the

afternoon eating tasty apple cake, barbequed sausages, and potato salad while we talked about everything under the sun. Most of us are interested in the current situation of Kinship Germany and our relationship to the Adventist Church. 'Round about 10 p.m. the group broke up slowly. We are looking forward to the next time and hope we can join the group soon. ▼



Kinship Older Adults

Self-empowerment as a Response to Ageism

In North America, and perhaps elsewhere, negative stereotypes of aging are common. For example, a Yale study looking at Facebook groups that concentrated on older adults found that all but one of the sites focused on negative age stereotypes. Further, 74% blamed older people for a variety of social ills, 27% infantilized them, and 37% advocated banning them from public activities, such as shopping!

Ageism is not harmless or frivolous. It can hinder people from opportunities for work, increase financial insecurities, and threaten people's morale and energy, perhaps even their health. Eventually society will change, as the value that older people bring to society comes to be recognized; but for the immediate future, older people, themselves, must act.

Paul Irving, Chairman of the Milken Center for the Future of Aging, calls for a stance of self-empowerment against this prejudice. He believes it is imperative that people fight against the tide of antagonism, rather than buy into the image of impotent agers or retreat in the face of it. His recommendations for self-empowerment are these:

- Prepare: read, listen, and enlarge our relational networks to learn how best to navigate "the system." Take care of ourselves, physically as well as mentally.
- Return to School. Lifelong learning of any sort helps to create opportunities, enhance confidence, and redefine who we are.

- Keep working. Work helps people to remain cognitively astute and lively. Work also helps people stay healthy.
- Arrange an optimal schedule. Create a lifestyle that is suited to your rhythms of rest and activity. Change the way in which you arrange your time, including your work schedule.
- Start a business, if this suits you. The people now most likely to consider themselves as entrepreneurial are the baby boomers, and they are starting the most new businesses.
- Retire differently. Consider phasing out of work and into another lifestyle. Simply dropping out and doing nothing is a recipe for disaster.
- Volunteer or pursue an encore career. Get involved with civic and community groups, and become a local leader. Through it all keep a sense of humor, smile and accept that there are always struggles in every life. So what?

As we see it, this seems to be good advice—not for fighting ageism in particular, but for positive aging in general. ▼

Reference: Levy, B. R., et al. (2014). "Facebook as a site for negative age stereotypes." *The Gerontologist*, 54, 172-176.

From "Self-empowerment in Later Life as a Response to Ageism by Paul Irving." *Generations*, 39, 2015, 72-77.

Older Drivers are Safer Drivers

Stereotypes about "old drivers" suggest that they are the worst drivers on the road—slow, inept, and dangerous. Perhaps it is time to change some of these views. In fact, older drivers are among the best on the road. The evidence? AAA's Foundation for Traffic Safety has concluded that these negative stereotypes are an undeserved myth, and that there are many positive aspects to the safety record for older people. Among them:

86% of Americans age 85 and older still drive, and 75% of them drive five or more days a week. Driving is not just for occasional jaunts.

Nearly 90% of older drivers (65 and older) reported no accidents in the last two years. 90% of older drivers reported no moving violations.

65% of drivers age 75 and older report never using a cell phone while driving.

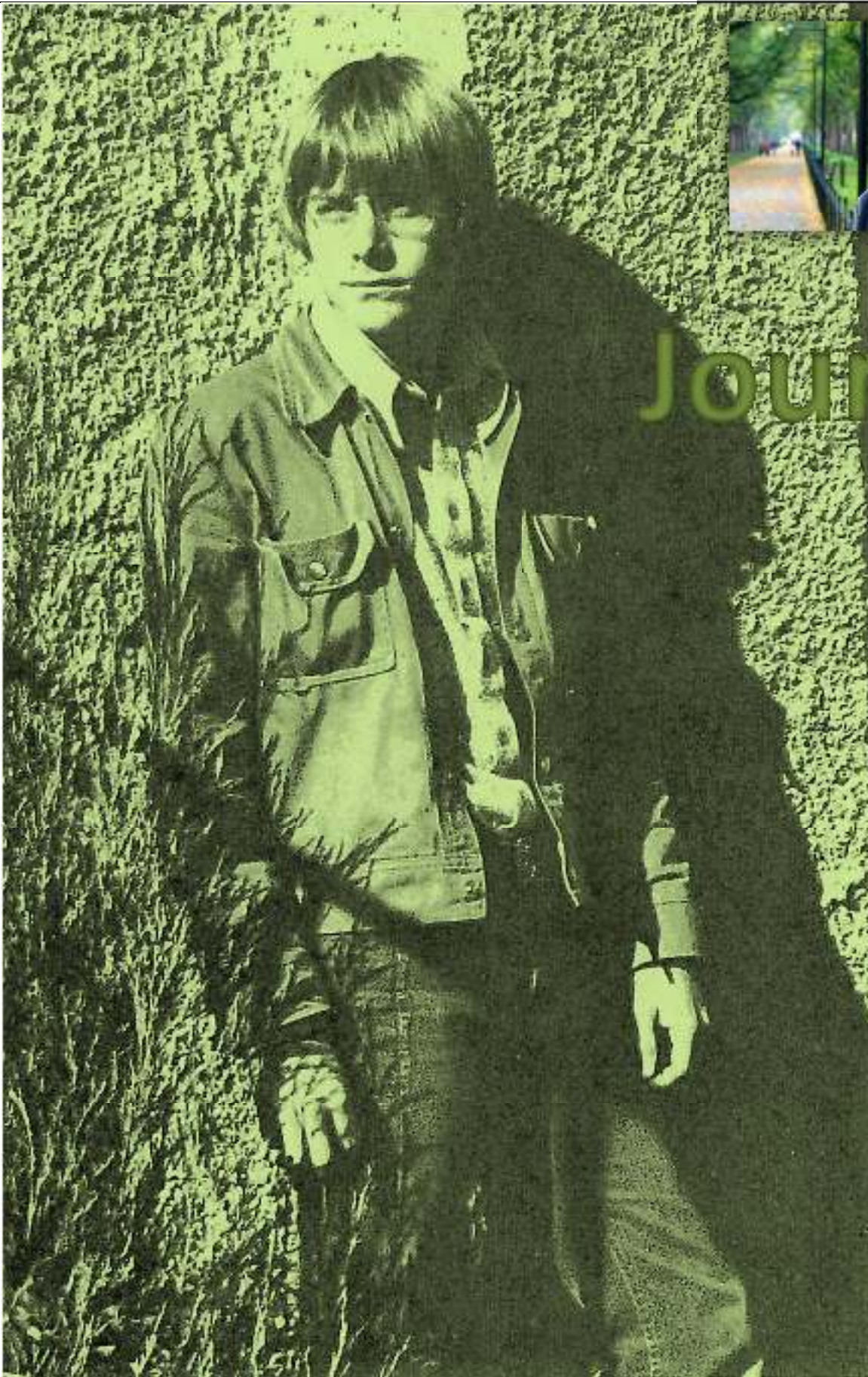
80% of drivers over age 75 favor medical screenings for drivers within their age bracket.

Despite this view, age-based testing has been evaluated many times, and results indicate that it has no impact on highway safety. At any age, certain medical conditions must be of concern, such as serious heart conditions, epilepsy, and complications related to diabetes, as well as dementia. States should focus on these issues and not on age.



From "Older drivers Among the Safest on the Road," *Erikson Tribune*, May 2015.

See more at: http://www.taosinstitute.net/2015-mayjune?utm_source=Positive+Aging+-+English+Issue+No.+92&utm_campaign=Issue+92+Pos+Aging+Newsletter&utm_medium=email#sthash.ALd4LGc3.dpuf



Journey

Part Three

As with my childhood, themes characterize my high school years. The things I did as part of my spiritual discipline at home continued and evolved. My orientation was always present; and, like before, there were many times when it forced itself into my awareness in ways I could not ignore. In high school, naturally, the expectation to date increased; and I tried.

To this part of my story, I have added a new dimension. I contacted a friend from high school and asked him to share his observations of me during that time.



When I was in grade twelve, Kelvin and I became roommates. We were so through the end of high school and on into college. He was a year younger than I was. Kelvin learned of my orientation years after we had gone our separate ways. I value his observations because they give external credibility to my very private inner reality. I have woven his observations into my story where appropriate.

Once my application to Kingsway was accepted, I received the school handbook. I read it from cover to cover. The expectations were typical of a Christian boarding school and covered topics like dress, music and entertainment, academic commitment, and social behavior. While they might have been a bit intimidating or repressive for some, I thought they were reasonable.

Unlike previous summers when I bemoaned the approach of the next school year, I was eager for the summer of 1971 to end.

I was not the only teenager from our church to be heading off to Oshawa that fall, but this was our year to do so. Like those that had gone before us, we were honored for our decision.

One Saturday evening in mid-August, after good fellowship and a feast of summer corn boiled over a fire in a church member's back yard, Barbara and I received the official off-to-Kingsway gift—an alarm clock. I felt privileged to be among a long line of such recipients.

Several days before classes were to begin, mom and I drove to Oshawa with the car full of things I thought I would need for the year. I was fifteen.

I laugh now when I think about the day I arrived. I had some colorful and coordinating shirts and pants in my suitcase, but the day we drove onto campus I was wearing a brand new light brown shirt and a pair of dark brown pants. Anticipating a

world of modesty and moderation, I wanted to dress appropriately conservative.

The first week was challenging. Once mom left, I was on my own. Everything was new—the campus, the dormitory, the cafeteria, the routine.

I was temporarily assigned the largest room on the top floor of the dormitory that first night. Unlike most two-occupant rooms, that one could have accommodated four people. From my twin bed in one corner, the room seemed cavernous.

Later that first evening when I tried to sleep, there was a lot of noise in the hall. It was the last week before school was to begin, so it was natural for the residents to be a bit rowdy. Because I knew no one, the noise and laughter only increased my sense of loneliness, and I felt some panic about my decision to leave home. I felt more alone that night than if I had been walking by myself on my uncle's 500-acre farm. I pulled the mattress off my twin bed and moved it into the walk-in closet. I felt better in that small quiet space.

The first person I met was Les. I remember chatting with him around a ping pong table in a dormitory lounge. He had been working on campus all summer, and so he was able to show me around. We soon learned we would be classmates. I was disappointed to learn, however, that he was about to head off for a Labor Day weekend retreat. Everyone who had worked on campus throughout the summer was eligible to go. Obviously, I was not. Waiting for Les and others to return made that first weekend very long.

Once the school year got under way, I settled in quickly. In many ways, my next four years at Kingsway were identical. They were a blur of work and study six days a week with worship and fellowship one day a week.

Adventist schools have always had a



work-study philosophy. To accommodate such a program, grade nine and eleven students, for example, might work from 7 a.m. to noon while the grade ten and twelve students went to class. In the afternoon, the whole process was reversed.

My first job was at the school wood-working factory. I worked hard stacking lumber that had to be cut to specification, glued, and baked, and then planed before being made into furniture. Except for a few slivers and tired feet from standing for hours, it was clear that I could manage hard physical labor, my orientation notwithstanding.

There was little about the public high school back home that compared with classes at Kingsway. I was in awe over being able to get credit toward my high school diploma by taking classes dedicated to the study of the Bible. That prayer was offered by a teacher or classmate before a math or science class amazed me. I put a lot of effort into my studies and my grades improved each year.

In addition to the required high school courses, I joined the band as an elective credit and tried to learn to play the trombone. It was not my instrument of choice because I was intimidated by the fact that you “slid” into each note rather than pushed a precise key, but the band director said they needed trombone players and that I had trombone lips.

Even at Kingsway there was one class I disliked—physical education. I was never comfortable playing sports, especially team sports. They made me very self-conscious. At the best of times, I was not that comfortable in my own body, but when the teacher said my team was be “the skins” for that period—those who were to play shirtless—I wanted to crawl into a hole.

The biggest change was living in a dormitory.



The School Band

The early 70s was part of the disco age, and even though it was a Christian school hints of that era were everywhere. Lava lamps were in, and the music of that decade could be heard playing softly in the rooms of seniors—they were allowed to have radios. Long hair was in style, but our hair could be no longer than the bottom of our earlobes. After all, we could not reflect the world too precisely. Some guys were constantly trying to push that boundary. I obeyed, of course.



*Prayer breakfast
on Sabbath morning*

Going to Kingsway meant being exposed to the grander aspects of Adventism. The headquarters of the Adventist Church in Canada was across the street from the campus church, and just a few steps further down the street were the offices for the church in Ontario. There was a steady stream of important visitors and special speakers. I was a bit starstruck by it all. At this epicenter of Adventism in Canada, I felt as if I were at the gates of heaven, or at least, at the foot of Jacob's ladder.

Naturally, a Christian boarding school is a spiritual center. Not every student wanted to be there, and some cared little about matters of faith, but that was not my case. You get out of an experience what you put into it, and I put my heart into every opportunity for spiritual growth. I quickly

With long hair came the hair drier for men. Previously, the hair dryer had been the domain of women and the beauty salon, but not in the 70s. On Sabbath mornings, especially, before heading off to church, the men's dormitory vibrated with the sound of those dryers, and you could barely breathe for the smell of Brut cologne. And, yes, I had a hair dryer. And yes, I spent my fair share of time grooming accordingly. Even though our polyester shirts, plaid cuffed pants, and platform shoes were generally modest, Sonny and Cher, or more accurately, the gang from *The Mod Squad* could have walked across campus and barely been noticed. In retrospect, it was a great time to be living in the dorm.

Saying I liked dorm life is an understatement. I thoroughly enjoyed it. It felt like a large extended family. Roommates were like brothers and the deans, though responsible for many, were surrogate fathers. Being in the shadow of multicultural

Toronto, the dorm reflected that reality. My first roommate, in fact, was Filipino. Overnight my Anglo-Saxon world had vanished.



Above and beyond the everyday events that made life enjoyable, it was the spiritual focus at Kingsway that was so meaningful to me.



The Cafeteria

those students with guitars would lead an informal fellowship where we sang the contemporary Christian songs of the day. One of those songs was *For Those Tears I Died (Come to the Water)* by Marsha Stevens. That song in particular would have great significance to me a few years later. Those evening circles of singing, sharing, and prayer were matched in intimacy only with our Sabbath-morning prayer breakfasts.

Only the devout were up and out of bed by 7:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning in

order to gather around a campfire, even in winter, for a breakfast of fruit, cinnamon rolls, and chocolate milk. Around those fires we sang, shared, and prayed together, again.

Compared to my tiny church back home, the church service at Kingsway was a spectacular event. There were hundreds of members compared to our 30. Our old upright piano and four-pedal two-console electric organ were eclipsed by a grand piano and a pipe organ, and the school choir was amazing.

After church, if you were fortunate, a family in the community would invite you over for some home cooking. In the afternoon, those who wanted to could join Sunshine Bands—our student ministry for the elderly—and tour a local nursing home to visit with and sing for the residents. Others just relaxed in their rooms.

The end of Sabbath was met with mixed emotion. Although Sabbath had been a time of rest, worship, and fellowship, the close of Sabbath meant it was time to pick up all the work and worries of the week. On the other hand, sunset meant the secular entertainment could begin. You never wanted to seem too eager for that, however!

As I mentioned previously, in addition to those scheduled religious events, I had my own spiritual practice. I was not the only one with personal devotional

habits, so I don't mention this out of pride. Rather, I want to emphasize that despite my spiritual life my orientation persisted, even intensified. The first did not diminish the latter—to my dismay.

I continued the habit I had started as a pre-teen of reading the gospels in conjunction with Ellen G. White's book *The Desire of Ages*. This was not a hand-on-the-door-knob-with-a-prayer-on-my-lips reflection before I tore off into my day. I literally tried to put into practice White's suggestion of spending "a thoughtful hour each day in the contemplation of the life of Christ."

As often as I could, usually very early in the morning when it was still quiet, I found a secluded place to read and meditate. Sometimes it was in my room. Other times it was some other quiet corner of the dorm.

I'm not a speed reader at the best of times, and when it comes to reading spiritual material as part of my devotional life, I'm even slower. I reflect on words and ideas slowly, methodically, and intentionally.

Because *The Desire of Ages* is 800 pages and designed to facilitate reflection on the life of Jesus, it often took me more than a year to work through it. I used each chapter to walk with Jesus, visualizing his interacting with the people he encountered. I tried to enter deeply into what I thought He would want me to know about

the Father and how those things should impact my interaction with others. During high school and on into college, I meditated and prayed my way through *The Desire of Ages* together with the gospels seven times.

I enjoyed that practice very much, and an hour was often too short. To this day, I get frustrated when life limits the time available for that kind of reflection.

Prayer, too, was always a pleasant experience for me. I had lists for family and relatives, classmates, and friends that I systematically cycled through month after month. Most of my prayer time, in fact, was spent praying for others. Any list I had for personal needs was short and simple. I never had a shortage of things to talk to God about.

Any time I did spend praying about my attractions was like inner ponderings focused on those plaguing "why" questions. That my attractions persisted was always a puzzle to me, because during high school and on into college, I was as spiritually focused and intentional about my faith as it was possible for me to be. Despite everything I did spiritually to develop my faith, my orientation persisted. This was very distressing and went against everything I believed should happen to a believer. ▼

To be continued



By Debbie Hawthorne-Toop

Friday night chat is a **safe** place for **all** women of the LBTIQ Kinship community to come together and visit. We currently have single, married, bi, and trans women joining us. We have chats anywhere from sharing our personal day-to-day lives to spiritual discussions. We only ask that everyone be respectful and kind to each other. Anyone having any issues is welcome to contact us at the e-mail address below. Your conversation will be kept confidential.

Chat is from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. every Friday night. The link to the site and password are posted every week on the Kinwomen Facebook page prior to chat time. If you are not on Facebook, please email us and we will be happy to share the login information with you! If you don't have time to be on for the full time you can log in any time between those hours. We would love



for you to drop in to say hello!

Please feel free to contact us with any other suggestions or ideas that you may have for Kinwomen. We can be reached at women@sdakinship.org and on Facebook. ▼

More information at: <http://www.sdakinship.org/regions-groups/groups/women-of-kinship.html>



By Jill and Sherri Babcock

This article is based on an interview with Jill and Sherri, who were asked to share the gifts and challenges they have faced as a lesbian couple, raising their two children.

Jill – Our local lesbian community and other lesbian friends gave us support. Because of them we were able to research a variety of conception options. We have an ongoing helpful network that gives us care and tips for whatever comes up for us on this parenting journey. Our kids can all talk to one another. When Grace’s friend, Gabi, shared with Grace how her Spanish teacher insisted on a genetic family tree for both sides of her family, Grace provided support and understanding. Grace then watched when her teacher assignments came out the next fall and was happy to find that she had been assigned to a different Spanish teacher who was more inclusive of alternate family structures. Having a network to support our kids as they confront situations like Gabi’s Spanish assignment comforts us. Our girls will never be isolated.

Sherri – I was a very reluctant parent, partially because I was sexually abused as a child, and feared the responsibility for someone so vulnerable. However, once I stepped into the role of mother, people—including my brother—noticed I was able to be much more loving. Parenting unlocked a part of my heart I would have never have exposed in the past.

Jill – I also noticed this about Sherri. She became more compassionate.

Sherri – Having a child retriggered all my pre-teen abuse memories. I would find myself crying in the fetal position. I would watch my daughter get to a specific age and think, “How could someone do that to a vulnerable being who was six months, three years, eight years old?”

Jill – One of the difficulties for me was physical. Parenting is physically difficult. I was sleep-deprived, up to all hours of the night nursing. One of Gabi’s mothers was a help, a friend and a listener. I appreciated having other lesbian mothers who under-

stood some of our specific issues. We can share and understand stories—like the time our children outed us at a grocery store.

Sherri – I learned how much I have in common with straight men. I learned empathy for them. As a new mom, Jill was so busy with Grace or Faith that she didn’t want her body touched. When she did, it belonged to the baby. Women don’t often understand what it is like for straight men who are new parents and how much they miss their spouses’ attention. I do. Being a parent also gave me a greater appreciation of the Biblical stories where a parent gave up a favorite child. My children have stolen my heart and I cannot imagine parting with them.

Both Jill and Sherri – Our daughters struggle with the concept of Father God. They can relate to a parent God. Because they have grandfathers, uncles, and pastors they may see God through a variety of relational lenses.

It is hard for us when Grace or Faith are treated poorly by peers and other adults. It breaks my heart when someone says to them, "Your parents are going to hell."

There was a kid at school who said, "Faith, don't hug your friend so long; that's like a lesbian." The teacher said, "You don't know what you are talking about." Faith said, "You don't know who you are talking to." When we heard what Faith said, we told her she was "Right on!" One of the good things about these interactions is that our girls are developing skills to stand up for themselves that will stay with them all of their lives.

Jill – The first couple of years Grace was in church school she got bullied by a little girl whose parents told her that we are an abomination and cannot be saved. This little girl tried to drown Grace, hit her, and threatened to bring a knife to school and kill her. After talking to the teacher several times, I finally called the principal and told him this behavior is in violation of the student handbook and it needs to stop now! Things got better. I find that Adventist schools have archaic anti-bullying training. The enforcement procedures are meaningless until parents stand up. When Grace

got to the public school I was impressed with the finely tuned anti-bullying protocols.

I foresee challenges that will arise as Faith develops her feminine wardrobe. Neither one of her mothers are style-conscious. We encourage her to find role models; thankfully, our school principal is a good one.

I imagine that when Grace or Faith is ready for the prom we are going to need to reach out to all the straight women, lesbians, and gay men in our lives who have a taste for style. There is not a chance I would find and assemble the appropriate and desired components.

Sherri – When Jill got pregnant with Faith we ran into people in the church who had assumed we were sisters. One of the men in our potluck group asked "So how did you come to be pregnant?" The kitchen went quiet. I said, "We used artificial insemination." Our general policy is wait until people ask and then just be direct. This disturbed the questioner. It turns out he was uncomfortable with homosexuality because he had been given a home by a couple of gay guys...who then solicited him.

Jill and Sherri – The only other challenge that comes to mind is that Grace had difficulty in middle school social settings telling others that she has two mothers. She finally told her lunch mates and was surprised that they were very affirming. Earlier in the year she didn't even want us to appear at the bus stop simultaneously. Since each of us was responsible for one of our children who needed to be near the bus stop we told her it didn't work with our schedule and we couldn't accommodate her sensibility.

Our congregation has been very good about letting us know when the NAD-directed topic of homosexuality is going to be discussed in Sabbath school. Teachers there adjust their rhetoric. They tell the Sabbath School class, "We cannot judge," and they do not condemn us in front of our children. This is a beautiful thing and we appreciate it. ▼

Jill Babcock is a licensed independent clinical social worker.

Sherri Babcock is a mechanical engineer and president of her own company.

Julie Wagner

One evening, after prayer meeting at my Bible college I asked God for clarity about the next steps in my life. I knew He had a plan for me but I had no idea what it was. As I pleaded with God for clarity, the phone rang. Brian was on the line. Though we are friends, I had not seen him or his wife in ten years. He greeted me with, "Hello. Penny and I are going to Micronesia. We're wondering if you would like to come with us."

Wow. What an answer! I asked him for time to consider the offer. Then, next morning I got a call from someone who knew our family. "Could you come to Kansas City for the summer and take care of my parents?" Wow again.

I had put out some applications for work in our local area. I got a job offer from one of them. In twelve hours I had three options where before there had been none.

I ended up going to Kansas City for the summer. With the arrival of autumn winds,

I left for Micronesia. I worked there for two years; the first as a fifth- and sixth-grade teacher, the second as office staff and a teacher of senior Bible. I had a great time. I remember liking the kids. It was nice to be able to help people.

While there I met someone who has become a lifelong friend and housemate for the last fifteen years. Fran, who is from Yap, needed to make a new start in her life. She tried going to Guam but could not find work. Eventually a friend gave Fran frequent-flyer miles so she could move to where I lived in the United States.

As part of a stressful transition, Fran had let her sister adopt her daughter. A short time later, the sister's husband died. Their village kicked the grieving widow out but would not let her take Fran's daughter. Fran and I went to Micronesia and got her back. I helped raise her daughter from a seven-year-old to someone who is now entering adulthood. She is the only child I will ever have.

Being a lesbian Adventist Christian was hard. I prayed that God would change me. As I prayed I heard Him say that I should go work with gay people, to embrace that work and learn from it. I could not believe God would tell me such news, and I turned my back on the very idea. Now I think, "What a waste of 25 years." If I had let God work with me, I would probably be married to a wife now, with kids of my own. I would have been more accepting of myself and would not have needed to struggle through depression, self-hate, and pain. I would have been able to accept myself and not felt the need for self-harm. I wish I had followed God's lead, but that is something I cannot now change.

These days I focus on being more accepting of myself. I don't have any grand ideas of what I should be doing now, but I like my work as a phlebotomist. I am mostly out with the people with whom I work. It is not a big deal to them. ▶

I am working through my own issues about God—who God is and the ways in which God accepts me. I am more able to see through other people's eyes now. I can better understand their pain and their needs. From this I can be an everyday witness. I have ridden the PFLAG float in our community parade. Next week I will staff the PFLAG booth in the community farmers' market.

I took several years preparing to be able to do this. Amazingly, there is a large gay community in my area but I don't

know a lot of them yet.

I like yellow, particularly yellow happy faces. For me bright yellow is happy. I guess the school bus was yellow, but that is not why I like the color.

I have two dogs. Jaxson is nine. Basil will be two in August. He is a seven-pound monster Chihuahua who thinks he is a pit bull. That is a bad connotation for pit bulls. They are not monsters like this Chihuahua, no matter what he thinks. Jaxon is a Chihuahua/Dachshund cross. He is mellow and shy but very protective.

When my mom died, Fran and I sold the family home and went west. We looked at places all over Oregon. I had some job choices and picked Florence. I could spend the rest of my life here. I like the community. I like my house. It was the price range I needed. I have three bedrooms. The sliding glass doors in the dining room go outside. My dogs like it so they can go in the backyard. It is exactly the type of house that I want for what I need.

In so many ways I am finding home. ▼



Intercollegiate Adventist Gay-Straight Alliance Coalition

IAGC is a grassroots group of Seventh-day Adventist students and teachers who would like to create a safe, non-judgmental environment for LGBTI members of their academic Adventist community. As of August 2015, there are Adventist gay/straight alliances on nine North American Adventist colleges and universities. The student leadership of IAGC would like to build ways to support LGBTI Adventist students internationally. You can reach the organization at <https://www.facebook.com/IAGCAdventist>.

In a lunchtime group conversation, five leaders of IAGC described the organization from their individual perspectives. If you have questions or comments, each of them has been willing to share their e-mail contact information. Jefferson Clark is the current president of IAGC.

Mischka Scott

IAGC is a way of giving us the family that we may have lost and a continuing chance to better know ourselves. This organization gives us a giant nationwide family we never knew we had. It is a path to freedom that helps us be more ourselves and to think for ourselves. IAGC is comprised of people of differing opinions and backgrounds who come together to give the generation after us something we never had: safety, love, acceptance, family.

mischkascott@gmail.com

Yeshara Acosta

It is the umbrella organization that brings together unofficially recognized gay-straight alliances on North American campuses. We have a voice where other campuses have none. IAGC brings us together and gives us strength in numbers. It gives each GSA a sense that they are not alone. It is a place that gives us permission to continue to grow spiritually.

Shield.Yeshara@outlook.com

AJ Oetman

This is the way Adventism all over the world can have a connection and shared experience. Each of our individual GSAs are now not isolated and help us after we have left our area where we got our education. We are the bridge.

findthebeacon@gmail.com

Jefferson Clark

For me the IAGC is an organization or network of like-minded individual LGBTI Adventists or allies that are seeking to create mutual respect and understanding for the LGBTI and religious communities on Seventh-day Adventist campuses across America. IAGC helps us to be more aware of the presence of LGBTI students. There is a difference between acceptance and approval. IAGC creates a larger network of individuals that become family. We have someone to turn to in hard times, be they LGBTI- or faith-related. The leaders of the IAGC member groups act as facilitators and support for local members who struggle to understand their personal identity, both spiritually and sexually, in an environment where questions asked were previously not answered or ignored.

IAGC.Southern@gmail.com

Jonathan Doram

IAGC is a sign that we are all in solidarity with each other. It gives legitimacy to each GSA no matter their number. IAGC shows that you can reconcile your spirituality and sexuality and that there are other people who will help you walk this journey. We are here to help pastors, campus administrators, church administrators, and anyone who is a part of this church navigate the journey of having conversations about spirituality, faith, sexuality, and gender. Please contact me, so we can start a conversation. I am here to help, educate, and share.

jonathan.doram@gmail.com

Jonathan Cook

I was involved with GASP [Gay and Straight People] at PUC when it was founded in 2008. I was able to witness the growth in membership of a grassroots, student-run club that was not officially sanctioned or recognized by the administration. It has been encouraging to see that the work at PUC and other Adventists campuses has grown to become a network that is now called IAGC. No longer can the church deny that the future will have significant contributions from LGBTIQ Adventist youth.

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Kampmeeting 2015



▲Daneen and Lilly ▼Karen Lee Herb and Ben▼



▼Toby and Grant▼



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“Gay SDA Play” ▲

▼ Yeshara—Jonathan—Dave

