



The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinsling International, Inc. Vol. 39, No.4, June/July 2015



Today is a big step in our march toward equality.
Gay and lesbian couples now have the right to marry,
just like anyone else.



#LoveWins

This ruling is a victory for friends, families, and organizers
who fought tirelessly for years for marriage equality.



#LoveWins

America should be very proud.



#LoveWins

Today we can say in no uncertain terms
that we've made our union a little more perfect.

KINSHIP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Floyd Pönitz (Intl. Growth and Development)

WHO WE ARE...

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

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

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



PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA
or visit Kinship's website www.sdakinship.org/resources
for information about

- Find a Gay Friendly Church
- *Homosexuality: Can We Talk About It?*
- *Living Eden's Gifts*
- Previous *Connection* issues
- ... and more.

CHAIRS

Executive Committee: Yolanda Elliott
Finance Committee: Bob Bouchard
Kampmeeting Committee: Linda Wright & Kristina Burgos
Communications Committee: Jonathan Cook
Governance Committee: Rosemarie Buck
Member Services: Naveen Jonathan
Int'l Growth and Development Committee: Floyd Pönitz

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Office Manager: Member Services Team
Web Administrator: Linda Wright
Connection Editor: Catherine Taylor

REGIONS AND GROUPS WORLDWIDE

www.sdakinship.org/regions-groups

CHAPLAIN

Marcos Apolonio, chaplain@sdakinship.org

CONTACT/INFORMATION

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SUPPORT KINSHIP

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to SDA Kinship Int'l, PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94563 or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (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.)

RESOURCES

www.someone-to-talk-to.net
www.buildingsafeplaces.org
www.itgetsbetterforadventists.org
www.sgamovie.com
www.facebook.com/sdakinship
... and more

From the Editor

Here in Southern Virginia, yesterday's heat index was 109 degrees. My elephant ears grew four inches. I turned around and they startled me. If I ignore my gardens for more than 20 minutes, vines take over several bushes. We've been having rather symphonic thunderstorms. Even our backyard raccoons look cautious. In my part of the northern hemisphere, it's time for summer reading. I would like to tell you I am reading thought-provoking, erudite histories of orientation and gender, as they have gifted the world. That would be a good thing. If you happen to be doing so, I would love to have you write a review and send it along. I, however, am reading at exactly the level my present mental bandwidth seems to enjoy: Sharon Lee and Steve Miller's space opera about clan Korval, Louise Penny's Canadian mysteries, Ann McCaffrey's saga of Pern, and, oh dear, yes, the *Outlander* series, and *Desire of Ages*—perfect summer reading. One of the things I am accidentally enjoying about all the more modern books is the way they incorporate LGBTIQ characters as part of the literary village's regular, everyday life. These characters remind me of those who have been part of the challenging journey to marriage equality and are now living their lives with two kids, three cats, one dog, one SUV, and a list of summer (or winter in the southern hemisphere) camps. Our gay agenda has (increasingly often) come to this. Thus, in the spirit of summer lounging, as well as winter firesides, we bring you more stories. You were warned that we are gradually doing a serialized version of Jerry McKay's journey. In this issue we are also including some overviews of stories that have stemmed from our corporate journey toward wholeness. They happen to be children's stories. I happen to think there is a remarkable amount of wisdom in children's stories. I think you will enjoy all of these and might find them good resources for people who are just beginning to come to an understanding of diversity, gender, and orientation. Meanwhile, wherever you are, in whatever climate, take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



Coming Events

Women & Children First

July 10-14, 2015



SDA Kinship Kampmeeting

July 14-19, 2015



European Kinship Meeting

27-31 August, 2015



Post-EKM Holiday

31 August-7 Sept., 2015



Book and the Beach

Mini-Kampmeeting

September 1 - October 4, 2015



www.sdakinship.org

Same-sex marriage in the United States

On June 26, 2015, the United States became the twenty-third country to recognize same-sex marriage nationwide, following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. The Court ruled that the United States Constitution requires all states to recognize marriages regardless of the partners' gender. The United States Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* declared that a state may not refuse to license same-sex marriages and may not refuse to recognize same-sex marriages from other jurisdictions. The Court heard oral arguments on April 28, 2015, and made its decision, divided 5–4, on June 26, 2015.

When Reality Confronts Ideology: Some Experiences of a Gay Christian



By Mike Lewis

Gay and Christian? Incompatible! Musician, artist and Christian—great combination! Scientific and religious—fascinating coupling for late-night conversations! Christian into traveling—perfect for becoming a missionary! But gay and Christian? A bit like a cleaver splitting my brain apart.

In my early life, two unquenchable, irresistible forces strove for supremacy. "Unclean!" screamed the Religious Right. "God hates fags!" shouted Bryant. "Illegal!" stated the law. "Unmentionable!" said society. "Be proud!" chanted the Gay Liberation Front. "Laugh at me!" minced Inman. They may have shouted, but the strongest voices were the internal ones.

After a sheltered childhood in a good Christian home, I grew up to realize that I was unquestionably and unchangeably gay. My Christian faith was at odds with whom I was discovering myself to be. A minefield lay ahead. I believed what I had been taught—all homosexuals were bound for hell—but that belief was incompatible with my belief in a loving, forgiving God. For years the conflict continued in my head and my body. It demanded answers and resolution. Self-acceptance and self-fulfilment were incompatible at that time. I could not, and God did not, change my sexual orientation. Many experiences had clearly demonstrated (yes, for me as a scientist, proof meant truth) that God loved me, and I could not walk out on God. But how could I reconcile all this?

My faith cost me dearly. I rejected my first boyfriend because I could not understand how a same-sex relationship could be compatible with Christianity. I wanted and needed relationship. I left God and went the way of the world. But God had other ideas, and brought me back, slowly and gently, into His way of life again. Probably just as well; I would have died of AIDS long ago had I not learned the value of a committed monogamous relationship over one-night stands.

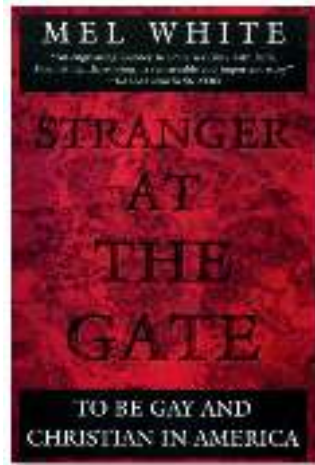
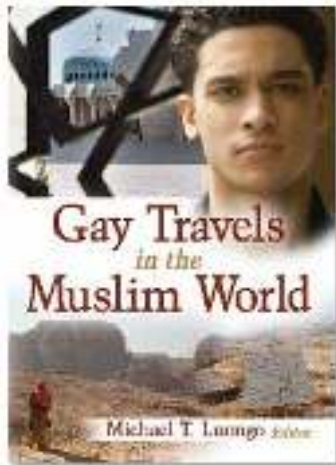
Back with God, my experience of life in church was largely good. Learning about the Christian faith, participating in worship, and becoming part of a church community was all hugely important for me. But all the while there was the fear of discovery; it

would have meant exclusion from what I held most dear. But "gay" cannot remain hidden, and when I "came out" to my local congregation it nearly split the church and was a terrible time for all concerned. Many were supportive, but others chose to remain incommunicative with closed minds.

In the early days of the internet I searched for "gay Christian," never imagining I would find others like myself. What I found amazed me. Beyond the naivety of the "only we are the saved" mindset, I discovered many sincere, committed gay Christians, fully at ease with themselves and their faith, some in committed, long-term relationships. I learned about reading scripture in different ways, understanding alternative hermeneutical approaches. And I saw how God was working in the lives of "ordinary" gay Christians. The conflicts within my mind slowly became resolved. I discovered I could be gay and Christian! My life changed forever.

What had changed? Many things. But two in particular. Firstly, the way in which I understood the Bible changed radically—I think for the better—and that continues as I further my education within the School of Divinity at St Andrews University. Dialoguing with others of similar faith, different faith, or no faith over recent years has proved hugely beneficial as I try to make sense of the world of which I am part. Secondly, I have learned the importance of putting sex in its right place. My experience has shown this to be within committed relationship, and that relationship is a threesome. God in prime position with my partner and me as co-equals under His Lordship. For me, at least, the recent passing of same-sex marriage laws is something I could only dream of as a young adult. Now I look forward to the time when same-sex Christian married couples can show to the world how "gay," "Christian," "relationship," and "marriage" can all fit into one totally positive sentence without any conflict. And society has changed. Homosexual intercourse is no longer illegal in many countries. From the homophobia and persecution of earlier centuries to the first "gay kiss" on "Coronation Street" to the legal recognition of same-sex marriage by the Scottish Parliament in December 2014, the status of LGBTI men and women has changed beyond belief.

Admitting to the reality of being gay and simultaneously having the ideology of Christian faith no longer need create conflict, either internally or externally.



I have experienced much throughout my wonderful life. I could have written from other perspectives: my career as an analytical spectroscopist, my interests in art, music, hiking, traveling, gardening, photography, (and more beside) have all contributed to my hugely rich and varied life. But my experience of being gay and Christian has probably been the challenge that taught me most. My experiences in this area are not unique. I learned much from the writings of others. Two books profoundly influenced me. *Gay Travels in the Muslim World* (Luongo (Ed.), 2009) records heart-rending accounts of young gay Muslim men and their struggles in similar situations. *Stranger at the Gate* (White, 1995) is the autobiography of a gay Christian minister. It tells how the reality of his being and the ideology of his Christian faith came into harmony.

Here I briefly share a little of my experience, not of work, pleasure or interests, but of being—being gay and being Christian. It is my hope that in briefly sharing these meanderings some readers of this short article will be moved to engage in thoughtful dialogue with others who are in some way “other.” Recognizing reality and gently remolding ideologies with sincerity, understanding, and a genuine desire for healing both internal and external conflict is sorely needed in today’s world.

This article is an amended version of that published under the same title in Convocamus, Vol 2, No 1, May 2015. Convocamus is an online interfaith publication providing a platform for scholarly dialogue. It is published in association with St Mary’s College and the Chaplaincy, University of St Andrews, Scotland.

<http://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/convocamus>.
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Resources

Watch Transforming History on Times Video.

Kay Clayton has been keeping an eye out for resources that might be useful to us. We will include them as she shares. This month she passed along the following video link:

<http://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000003740068/transforming-history.html?emc=eta1>



Elections 2015 Slate of Offices

The Nominating Committee is pleased to present to you, the Kinship membership, the following slate of candidates which you will have the opportunity to vote into office this July.



President - Yolanda Elliott

As President, my job is to facilitate the work of the board and senior volunteers and directors. In the next two years, I'll continue to meet with Member Services and the Advisory Council to ensure that the needs of our members around the world and our allies at Adventist institutions are met. In the next two years I will be overseeing the implementation of our new strategic plan and will need the support and ideas of all members to make that possible.

I believe that Kinship offers all our members something just as I believe all our members have something to offer Kinship. Kinship is a community that supports each other, offers a safe space for those who need it, and also is respectful of each other’s journey. Whether members are currently Seventh-day Adventists or no longer a part of the Adventist denomination, this is a safe place for all. I also believe that Kinship should make compassion a core value where we treat others the way we wish to be treated: with justice, equity, and respect. I believe Kinship members need not allow the church to treat us with disrespect. Those of us who are out and comfortable with ourselves can show others that it’s possible to have a healthy and whole life being who we are. This is a message that our community needs and the church needs, too. I have been Region 2 coordinator (mid-Atlantic states) since 1996. I served as Director of Women’s Interests for many years and also served as Vice-president and am currently President.

Vice-President - Naveen Jonathan

I am running for re-election for the position of Vice-President of SDA Kinship International. In the past two years I have worked on leading the



Member Services Team to explore, through discussions and ideas, ways members can engage more with the organization. I have also worked with the Member Services team to hire our first ever assistant dedicated to manage member needs in the United States. I have assisted the President in planning/executing board meetings, attending to organizational issues that arose, and leading the strategic planning review process. If re-elected, I will continue to develop Member Services to be better attuned to the needs of Kinship members and find ways that we can structure ourselves as an organization to be more effective for member engagement. I will continue work to ensure the development and implementation of the strategic plan that guides the Board in all of our endeavors. I will continue to assist and support the President in all organizational needs that arise. Thank you for considering me for re-election for the position of Vice-President.



Director of Church Relations - Dave Ferguson

Significant changes in the last two years

As Director of Church Relations, I have experienced very busy times during the past two years. We have seen the church finally acknowledge our existence by hosting a summit in South Africa in 2014, which resulted in numerous leaders contacting Kinship for information; in presentations that debunked

the myths that being gay is a choice and therefore can be changed; and in local coverage in the South African press about Kinship. As the liaison to the Intercollegiate Adventist GSA Coalition (IAGC), there has been a sea change on Adventist campuses as a result of the visibility of these unofficial groups creating awareness of the needs of LGBT students.

What does the future hold?

In the coming term, I expect to see further development of strong GSA groups on Adventist campuses, both in the U.S. and in other parts of the world, with the challenge continuing to be finding ways for these groups to work together to reach their full potential. The *Building Safe Places—for Everyone* program will provide new opportunities for developing congregational models for how to minister to and include members of the LGBT community. There will be a strong link between church relations, the communication team, and the development team to coordinate outreach and seek funding for our projects. I hope to see further collaboration, building on current relationships within the denomination.

Director of Women's Interests - Debbie Hawthorne-Toop (to be voted by Kinship women)



For the past two years I have welcomed new members, planned women's weekends, worked hard to keep Kinwomen a safe place for all, and tried to bring a caring touch to the group. As Director of Women's Interests for the next two years I plan to continue planning awesome KinWomen weekends, assist with chat as needed, work to keep KinWomen safe and inclusive for all LGBTI women, and work with the Kinship board to continue making Kinship the positive influence and supportive organization it is.



How to Vote

You may cast your votes **between July 5 and July 17, 2015** using the links that will be provided in an election notice email. You must enter the email address at which you received the election notice in order for your vote to be counted. No one can see how

you voted, but using your email address to identify you insures that everyone who votes is a member and that each member can only vote once during the elections.

The **elections will close at 7 a.m. Pacific Daylight Time (2 a.m. GMT) on Friday, July 17, 2015**. The election results will be announced at Kampmeeting during the business meeting to be held at 11:00 a.m. on Friday, July 17, 2015, and will appear in the Members Area of the website, the next issue of the *eNews*, and in the *Connection*.



Thank you for being a member of SDA Kinship and for exercising your right to vote in this election of members for the Board of Directors.

The annual pre-Kampmeeting Event Women and Children First—July 10 - 14, 2015 Granny Gert's Cabin, Lake Arrowhead, California

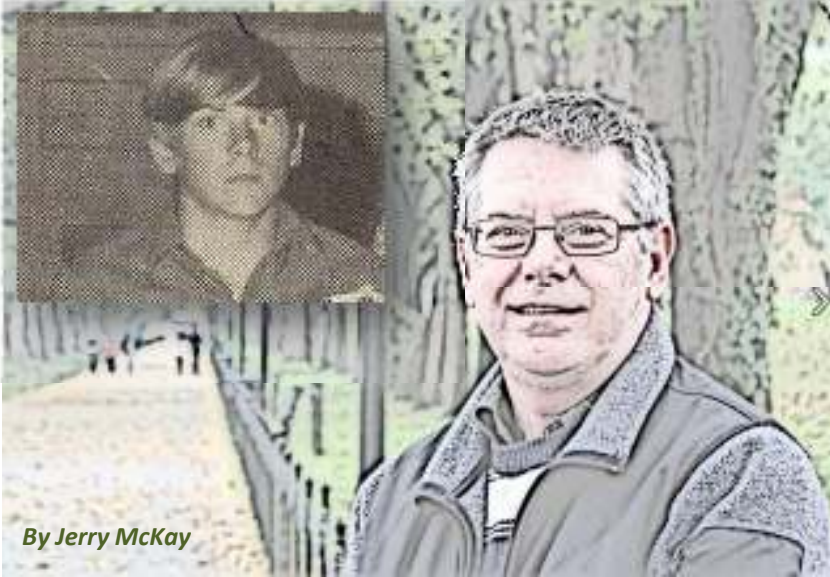
A special retreat for the women of Kinship in sunny southern California! Bring yourself (and your children, if you wish) and enjoy this time to rest your body and soul while cultivating the friendships that are so important to us! Register at www.sdakinship.org.

Book and the Beach Mini-Kampmeeting

September 30 - October 4, 2015

Nags Head, North Carolina

We've figured out a way to make it even easier for you to join us for our September 30 - October 4 weekend that will include an adventure and dinner at a restaurant, lots of music, devotionals, and discussions. We look forward to seeing you there! Register at www.sdakinship.org.



Journey

Part Two



Memories of my early school years are generally positive, but adolescent memory is selective. As might be expected, it is the rare and bizarre events that have stayed with me.

My first two years of education were in one-room schools with one teacher responsible for all eight grades. Mrs. Millar ran a tight ship and yet created a warm environment. There were a lot of open-book exercises and copious copying of notes from the board. If we finished our work, we colored quietly and listened to what was being taught to the upper grades. Our library consisted of ten small shelves behind two doors at the front of the classroom.

Before switching to a modern hand-cranked copier, Mrs. Millar had to use a flexible gelatinous mat that absorbed special ink when dampened. Then the ink was transferred to other paper when it was pressed down onto the surface. No one liked that last copy as the lines were blurred and it was quite faded. There were

the very special days when the “film man” from the school board would bring educational movies for us to see. Watching him set up the large film projector was entertainment itself. It was the only time the blinds in the windows were pulled down! The annual Christmas concert we rehearsed and performed for our parents was the highlight of the year.

Apparently skipping was my forte, because I was asked to demonstrate my technique to the grade seven and eight classes. I was proud of my ability and yet embarrassed, especially having to perform in front of the older boys. In addition, there is a one-time event, a bizarre event and one “traumatic” event that I still remember.

There was the afternoon the rabid cat showed up at the edge of the school yard. Word spread rapidly. Before the school went into lock down, we had all gathered to see the mad cat gnawing on the bottom wire of the fence. It was as if we were in an episode from *The Twilight Zone*. Nor-

malcy returned only after a school official removed the cat.

Then there was the afternoon Dennis, my grade-two classmate, got into trouble for trying to hide in the boy’s toilet during a game of hide and seek. And, no, he didn’t hide in just the boy’s washroom. He hid in the toilet. You might wonder how that could be possible until you knew the toilets were just seats fastened atop large pipes that opened into sewage holding tanks. Fortunately, he was able to hold on until an eighth-grader rescued him from a disgusting fate.

The event that was *traumatic* was being given the strap for talking too much to a girl in grade one. We were both to be disciplined. However, when the strap slapped down on my palm with more noise than pain, Darlene burst into tears. Seeing her distress, Mrs. Millar decided it would not be necessary to discipline her in the same way. I couldn’t believe it when we were sent back to our seats. That overt example of inequality scarred me for life!

By the time I was ready for grade three, those one-room schools were no longer used for all eight grades. Instead, the school board decided to gather children from the same grade into one school. That meant busing kids all over the township. Kids from one village ended up in different villages, and family members were separated and sent to different schools. As a result, my sister and I never attended the same school. This new arrangement may have been why grade four was a very difficult year.

That year, I was bused to a new school and students from neighboring villages joined us. There was a group of four boys, all from the same village, who tormented us. I'm sure they had all failed a grade or two and so were older and bigger than the rest of us. Those bullies liked to constantly "demonstrate" wrestling holds on us smaller guys, use us for various humiliations and generally force us to play in ways we didn't want to. There was nothing those guys did that interested me. I wanted nothing more than to be left alone to play on the swings with the girls or read a book rather than kill frogs and help torment other children.

The psychological stress from months of anticipating what might happen each new day out behind the school took its toll on me. I started to develop psychosomatic stomach pain every Sunday evening that lasted into Monday morning. Our family doctor finally figured out what was going on. My mother brought the issue up with the teacher, but it didn't help much. The teacher was nearing retirement, and she had to manage a half dozen over-aged, over-sized Philistines on her own. It wasn't easy to keep the terror at bay. There was nothing pleasant about that year.

Occasionally, public education and religious instruction came together. This was the case during grades five and six. My fondest memories at that school are of our Friday afternoon religion classes that that teacher included in her Friday curriculum. It was a very simple format. The teacher



Grade-two Class

read a short story from the Bible and drew a simple moral lesson. Then she had us illustrate the lesson in a notebook. I enjoyed those 30 minutes very much.

Nothing notable happened for the next year or so. To say they were normal years only means life was a routine of school, church, and managing the ongoing conflict at home. 1970, however, was the start of a sequence of changes that would continue through the next few years. Before I focus on those changes, I want to bring my sexual orientation into the story.



Hints of Orientation

As a pre-teen, all of the biological and environmental factors that go into shaping one's sexual orientation and identity were already in motion. Events from my formative years are easy to describe, but it is not so easy to articulate my awareness of my sexual orientation and how I experienced it. I was already aware of feel-

ing different, however, and was troubled by those feelings. I want to highlight some external events in my life, as well as aspects of my personality which seem innate as they relate to my orientation. They become important in years to follow as I struggled to make sense of my experience emotionally, psychologically, and spiritual-

ly. They also played into what I would be told caused homosexuality and what a "cure" would involve.

I was immersed in a heterosexual environment. Though bizarre and dysfunctional at times, the adults around me all modeled heterosexual interaction. Even

though my parents' relationship was clearly strained, I could see that they were attracted to the opposite sex. Opposite sex modeling was the only thing I knew.

As with a few boys, I have learned, I had instances of "show and tell" with a neighborhood friend during my pubescent years, and there were a couple of sleepovers when we "fooled around." He was barely one year older than I. For me, those "experimental" events were little more than extensions of our general mucking about. I could say that they were intriguing moments and that perhaps they provided me with some degree of comfort or made up for some intimacy I was lacking at home, but it seems a stretch to say they caused my orientation. I have often wondered what impact they had on my friend. I do know, however, that as an adult he was heterosexual. Years later, I learned that another friend, with whom there had been no "show-and-tell" experiences, did identify as gay.

The only other incident of a sexual nature was with one of the bullies in grade four. The one involved had, in fact, always been more protective of me than the others, and he was never as mean. I was ten going on eleven and he was probably a year older. He liked to draw my attention, during class, to the fact that he had an erection, of sorts, hidden under his hand below his pants pocket. This didn't happen often, and he probably did the same with others.

Why do I remember this? Two reasons come to mind. One was fear. I was afraid the teacher would see what he was doing and we would get into trouble. The other reason is because I felt some attraction to him, and this, too, frightened me. Perhaps my attraction was nothing more than liking the fact that he shared this risky secret with me, that he liked me in some way. Nothing more ever came of those in-class demonstrations, and as with my "show-and-tell" neighborhood friend, I know my bully friend was heterosexual as an adult.

I must stress that, beyond these experiences, there were no incidents of sexual abuse with an adult.

My earliest awareness of same-gender attraction or "being different" usually came up unexpectedly. They were dur-

ing moments of contrast with what other boys my age said or did.

In grade five and six, the other boys talked about girls and we played silly little games. Following the lead of friends, in class and during our school bus rides to and from school, I "selected" girls to pass notes to, indicating that I liked them. It was nice to get similar notes in return, but those adolescent games held no meaning for me. I know that exchanging similar notes with my male classmates would have been more captivating. When some classmate made a comment about Mary's boobs, it was then that I was awkwardly aware of my lack of interest in those things. At the same time, I knew I found Johnny strangely appealing in some intangible way.

My response to those flashes of awareness was to push everything to the back of my mind and return to whatever we were doing.

During my summer camp years, I felt that same draw to certain guys, especially the "older" camp counselors. They were always appealing in ways the sixteen-year-old female counselors were not. It was not a sexual interest. I just found those young men physically attractive and more interesting than the girls.



Then there were those Sears catalogues. Whether one is heterosexual or homosexual, I think most young men, especially those in isolated rural areas, remember the arrival of the Sears or Eaton's

mail-order catalogue. Not only did they have pictures of potential Christmas gifts, they had those clothing sections. I felt nothing as I glanced through the women's section but I was sheepishly aware of wanting to linger in the men's section. Sometimes I would deliberately stay in the women's section trying to be attracted. There was no overt sexual fantasy associated with those pictures of young men in their T-shirts and Stanfield briefs, yet I was confused and frustrated over why they were so appealing. I know it was the shape of the body that was appealing. The hourglass figure of the female body never caught my attention like the broad shoulders and slim waist of the male figures. If I had been subjected to those government military tests designed to weed out homosexuals, I'm sure that my young eyes would have dilated in that telling way.

The reason for this appeal was a mystery. I would hazard to guess that it would be just as difficult for my heterosexual male friends to explain how and why they felt as they did when glancing through the women's section of those catalogues.

In the mid to late sixties, as I was passing through puberty, there was nothing on the three TV stations we could pick up on our black and white television that even hinted at homosexuality. Husbands and wives did not even sleep in the same bed in TV programs at that time, and the words *pregnant* and *pregnancy* were just coming off the "offensive" word lists. But again, I remember finding some boys on some shows distractingly appealing.

Between 1963 and 1965, the CBC produced one hundred episodes of *The Forest Rangers*. I loved the series because it was set around a wonderful old wooden fort with a large gate and high walls and stairs that took you up to the club house on the second-level. Every episode was a new mini mystery or adventure waiting to be solved. I was 9 when the series ended, but it went into endless re-runs. The show stands out in my memory because the older I got the more distressingly appealing several of the characters became, especially slim and tanned junior forest ranger Pete!

In addition to those memories, there were aspects of my personality that, al-

though based in stereotypes, portrayed a picture of those with a certain kind of orientation.



The Forest Rangers

In elementary school, games that involved hard fast moving objects had no interest for me. Doing well in cursive writing was important, and I took the time to carefully color the illustrations in my notebooks. I was always conscious of my appearance and wanted the colors of my clothes to go well together. I didn't like wrinkles in my shirts, either. I had little or no interest in small engines or cars. In general, I liked beautiful things: flowers on the table and candles at sunset. These characteristics seemed to flow naturally from within.

What may be less noticeable is how I experienced my body or how I carried myself.

In most situations, I can "pass" for straight. However, if you knew me well or had watched me, you might have become

aware of mannerisms that are more feminine, as they say. I have always been aware of this, even though I never consciously tried to imitate mannerisms that would be called feminine.

During summer camp days, I remember standing with a group chatting about something important and trying to make a point. Out of the blue, someone said, "Don't stand like a woman." I think I had my hands on my hips in a womanly way in his mind. I was stunned by the comment and ever after wondered who decided how someone is supposed to stand, sit, or move their body. If I was comfortable crossing my legs when I was sitting, whose concern was that!

Whatever the case, there is something very natural about the way I positioned or carried my body that was not cultivated, yet did not fit the so called norm for "real" men. I know how to use an axe, however, so keep your distance.

As a fifteen-year-old, I was well aware of the generally accepted male/female role distinctions, but in my mind, they were silly. This is why, when my father's mother died in 1972, and my uncle was left on the farm to fend for himself, I volunteered to stay with him for a while to help out. Although I could have helped with outdoor chores, as I had helped him in the fields and the barn over the years, I offered to do what my uncle needed help with the

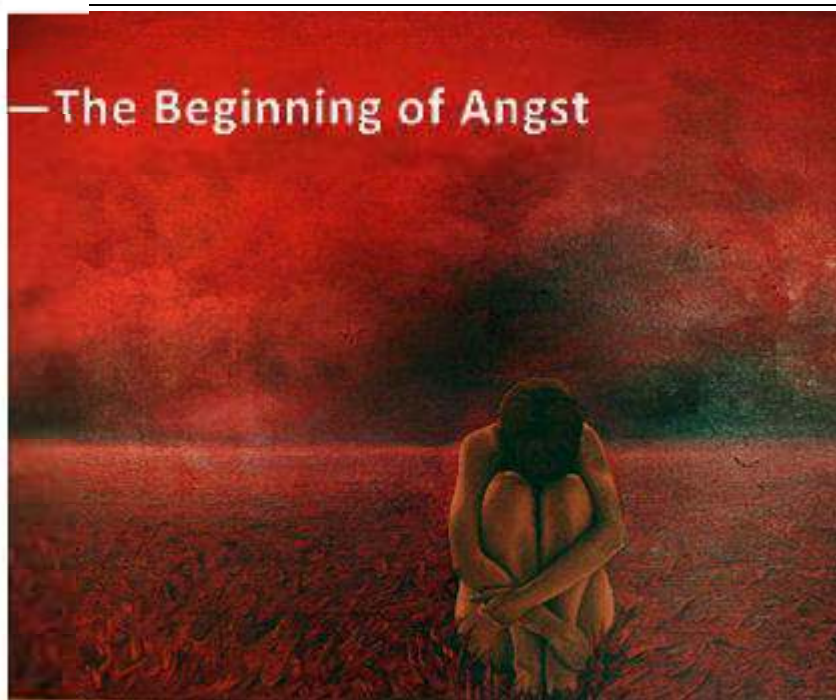
most—the cooking and cleaning. I could do it almost as well as my grandmother, having watched her so many times. I didn't feel feminine helping in this way. It felt very natural, and I enjoyed it. Besides, it was something I thought Jesus would have done.



Grandmother and uncle

Wouldn't it be ironic if emulating Jesus brought out my feminine side and inadvertently nurtured my orientation! This may sound farfetched to some, but not many years later this kind of logic would be suggested to me as being part the cause of my homosexuality.





Every awareness of same-sex attraction created angst, and I know why. One cannot grow up in a heterosexual environment and not become aware of how odd or different one's feelings are compared to the boys and men around you. This was not the only source of my distress, however.

When I was ten, eleven, and twelve, I was using those reading schedules that challenged you to read the entire Bible in a year. Doing so meant that by January 20, I reached the story of Sodom. If I maintained that reading schedule, I read Leviticus chapter 18 by the 20th of February.

The average person would have read those chapters and not given them much thought dismissing the text as odd or disgusting yet irrelevant to their experience. Not so for me. As a child who was reading the Bible regularly and took it seriously, I made a connection between those texts and the strange feelings and attractions I had. My uninformed reading of scripture collided with my feelings and intensified my distress.

I say "uninformed" reading because there is so much more going on in the Sodom story, for example, than what first meets the eye. If I had kept up with my read-the-Bible-in-a-year schedule, I would have reached Ezekiel chapter 16 by mid-September. Like most enthusiasts, however, even I had given up by that point.

Had I continued to read, at the very least, I would have discovered what Ezekiel said Sodom's horrible sin was. Verse 50 is revealing:

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore, I did away with them as you have seen."

Even though verse 50 lists several explicit reasons as to what was wrong with that city—reasons you seldom hear trumpeted in sermons—it would have taken more study and maturity than I was able to muster at the time to understand the context for the *detestable* things Ezekiel alluded to.

The entire chapter of Ezekiel 16 is devoted to detailing Israel's history of idolatry which focuses on abandoning God and playing a harlot with other nations. Israel's harlotry included all kinds of sexualized rituals and practices not known to me. Ezekiel gives the distinct impression that Israel practiced idolatry with more gusto than the nations around it.

Because I never knew about Ezekiel's insights, and I never spoke about these things to anyone, I wondered, in the secret places of my heart, if there was something about me that deserved destruction by fire. The awakening and intensification of

my attraction combined with my uninformed Bible reading created feelings of fear, guilt, and shame.

In fact, I was thinking and feeling all of this when I was baptized. I remember hoping that after I came up out of the water that I wouldn't feel the way I had before going under the water. When I came up out of the water, it was only a few minutes before I knew nothing had changed. I could not understand why.

As I moved on into my teen years a very private psychological pain started to take hold of me. I continued to function quite well outwardly, but I was slowly breaking up internally and disconnecting emotionally from the world around me.

I return now to 1970 and the changes in my life that started to unfold.

In July of that year, I entered my teen years with all the challenges that accompany those changes. That fall, the school board closed all of those one-room schools, and we were bused into nearby towns to join the town kids in their multi-room schools. Although it was exciting, it was stressful. From one room with one teacher we moved from class to class taking different subjects from different teachers. At noon, the school yard had 300 kids to navigate instead of 30. Most notably, it was my introduction to highly structured sports in gymnasiums, which I hated.

Five months later, on the same day in the winter of 1970, both of my mother's parents died of natural causes. My grandmother was dying in the hospital of cancer, but my grandfather died at home five hours before she did. The end result was that we moved into my mother's parents' house in the same town as my new school. Although it was only a four-mile relocation, overnight we went from being country folk to town folk with hot running water, a paved driveway, and stores within walking distance. My sister and I no longer needed to take a bus to get to school, and church was in the same town.

Grade eight was a difficult year academically. I know my concentration was affected by the ongoing stress at home and my growing discomfort and preoccupation over my feelings. Even though I struggled academically, I managed to complete the year. My social life was becoming more of a challenge, as well.

We were just beginning our teen years; yet, the expectation of male/female interaction was already increasing at school. The grade-eight students got to have dances at school on Friday afternoon after classes finished. Occasionally, I participated, but I didn't really want to attend. Everything I did was tempered by my religious convictions, and I was trying to take my relationship with Jesus seriously.

I was uneasy about going to those dances because I believed dancing was wrong. I continued to "think about" girls

and did dance with Sarah once or twice. I even managed to kiss one neighborhood girl, but there were no sparks! From late fall to early spring, when the sun set early on Friday evening, I just wanted to go home to *keep the Sabbath* rather than slow dance with a girl I supposedly liked. As I look back on these events, I can see how my beliefs were actually making it easier for me to ignore what was going on in this fundamental area of my life. It was the beginning of what would go on for years.

The first year of high school was not traumatic, but neither was it memorable. In fact, I don't remember much at all. It was one block from home, so I got to come home for lunch. That I liked. There was one male classmate with whom I would have liked to hang around, because he was a quiet guy, but he lived in the country. I remember only one girl. She was teased because of her appearance, and that troubled me.

Like grade eight, high school gym class was the worst period of the week. There were more contact and team sports: wrestling, lacrosse, and of course football and hockey. Even if I had shown an interest, I was usually the last or second last to be picked because of my size. Back then activities like cross-country skiing or tennis were not a part of school sports programs. I would have enjoyed those. I might have joined the ski club, but it was expensive and the ski trips were always on Sabbath,

so I refused to sign up.

I hated the smell of the gym, and the change rooms and communal showers made me anxious. I was a little guy, rather bashful and a late bloomer, but the real problem was those feelings. Being in grade nine meant there were the more developed guys from grade eleven or twelve running about in their towels or less. I felt a deep discomfort and fear because of wanting to peek. The attraction was distressing, but knowing I felt no attraction toward any of the girls was even more distressing. The *why* questions that would hound me for years to come, were beginning to take up more and more of my psychological energy. *Why* do I feel this way? *Why* doesn't God take this away? *Why* don't I like girls? *Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?*

As my first year of high school came to an end, a way out of everything that stressed me—family and those attractions—seemed to open up. The Adventist church has one of the largest private school systems in the world, and there happened to be a boarding school three hours away in Oshawa, Ontario. Although this meant paying for private tuition, my parents agreed to let me go. I was so excited. That summer was spent registering and getting ready for the biggest adventure of my life.

To be continued ▼

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10 Children's Books That Paved the Way for a New Queer Protagonist

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/28/lgbtq-childrens-books_n_7462250.html]

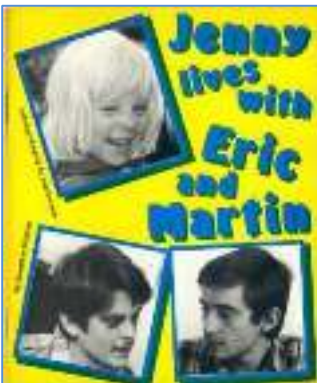


In Kendrick Daye and Myles E. Johnson's *Large Fears*, Jeremiah Nebula may not be a bullfrog. But he is the queer, black protagonist of a children's picture book—a genre traditionally dominated by heterosexual, cisgender, white characters. Although the

politics of representation is an issue for all literary forms, parent sensitivity has made materials for young readers particularly resistant to plots that question gender, sexuality or the institution of the family.

Daye and Johnson were frustrated with those age-old patterns, so they decided to create new ones. Their recent Kickstarter campaign casts the project as both subtle and radical. Jeremiah, they say coyly, is just a boy who loves pink. But they also stress how his queer, black identity makes him “a character that defies gender roles, race politics, sexuality, and his fears.”

Jeremiah's story builds on over 30 years of children's books that portray LGBTQ characters, translating complex issues of gender and sexuality to an accessible, picture-heavy format. These books, though, reveal far more than cutesy anecdotes. They are instructional, cathartic, and ethical, explaining different family models, connecting children with LGBTQ identities or parents to fictional counterparts, and teaching values of acceptance at impressionable ages.

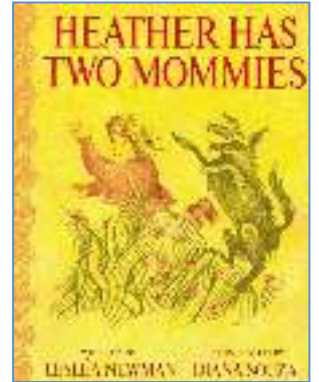


The black-and-white Danish photobook *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, by Susanne Bösche, was arguably the first to feature gay characters. Two men raise their daughter, Jenny, whose biological mother lives nearby and visits from time to time. Most events are normal children's book fare like laundry-folding and surprise birthday parties. But the characters also deal with a

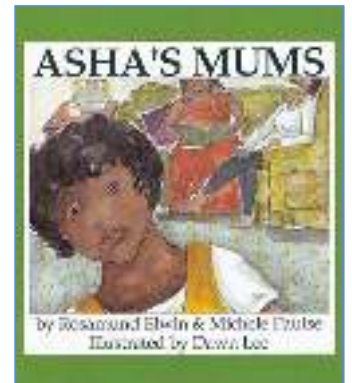
homophobic comment from a stranger in the street.

By Colton Valentine

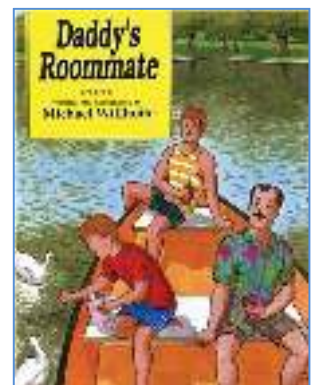
Like Bösche's story, *Heather Has Two Mommies*, by Lesléa Newman and Diana Souza, follows a child with same-sex parents. New plot points include artificial insemination and an inclusive discussion at Heather's playgroup about different family structures. In real-life playgroups, the response to this book was far less benign: the story rocked the U.S., and the resulting controversy led to extensive parodies including a “Simpsons” version: “Bart Has Two Mommies.”



In *Asha's Mums*, by Rosamund Elwin, Michele Paulse, and Dawn Lee, Asha needs to get a permission slip signed by her mother, but she is perplexed when she must decide which of her two moms to ask. While Heather was lucky enough to have an accepting playgroup, Asha confronts a far less hospitable school—and world. It's a tale for anyone whose family does not fit into educational bureaucracy, and Asha's African-Canadian identity marks a decisive step away from lily-white characters.



In *Daddy's Roommate*, by Michael Willhoite, you might recognize the name from the 2008 presidential campaign when it “came out” that Sarah Palin, back in her 1995 councilwoman days, had said the book should not be permitted in public libraries. Why? There's a gay relationship between the father and his new roommate-actually-boy-friend, Frank. Plus it all starts off with a divorce and arrives at a pretty clear message: “Being gay is just one more kind of love.”



A child is a guest in the house to be loved and respected – never possessed

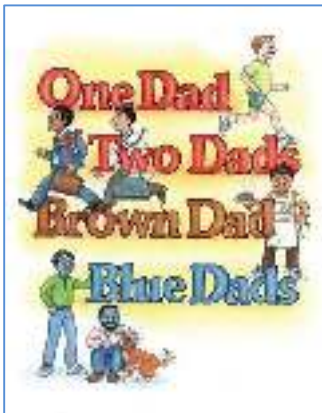
—J.D. Salinger

10 Children's Books That Paved the Way for a New Queer Protagonist

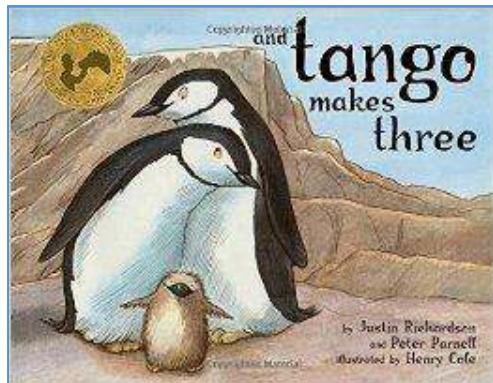


King & King, by Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland, was originally published in Dutch and offered both a new take on the royal marriage story, with a gay child rather than just gay parents. “I’ve never cared much for princesses,” says the princely protagonist, as he finds a series of potential wives paraded in front of him by his wedding-hungry mother. Then, he spots one of the princesses’

brothers. They are soon crowned King and King, and the story ends with a subversive same-sex kiss—which launched a series of conservative campaigns to ban the book.



Instead of focusing on a single storyline, **One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads**, by Johnny Valentine and Melody Sarecky, features two kids comparing different paternal figures. “Blue,” it turns out, is a not-so-subtle euphemism for “gay,” and the children slowly come to the realization that all skin colors and sexual identities are equally valid. (Bonus points for the enchanting Seussical rhyming scheme.)



And Tango Makes Three, by Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell, and Henry Cole, is a tale of two male penguins who are chick-less until a zookeeper helps them adopt Tango from a heterosexual couple. Animals are always one of the easier ways to discuss unconventional storylines, but that didn’t stop Singapore from banning the book along with two others last year. In fact, it’s ranked third on ALA’s list of “Most challenged books of the 21st century,” which is hard to explain considering how heartwarming these polar birds are. Did we mention it’s based on real gay penguins at the Central Park Zoo?

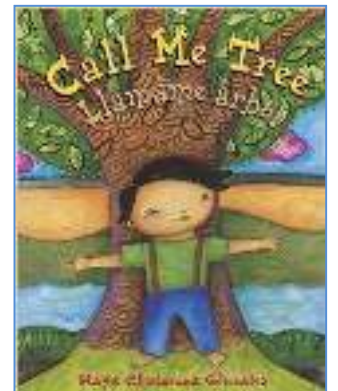
Bailey is a boy by day who, at night, dreams of cross-dressing. His night-time escapades are rebuked by his family, until he finds a seamstress in playmate Laurel. Bailey’s story in **10,000 Dresses**, by Marcus Ewert and Rex Ray, is an early forerunner to Jeremiah’s, for it broke from the gay-character plot to examine what it meant to be a gender-queer child.



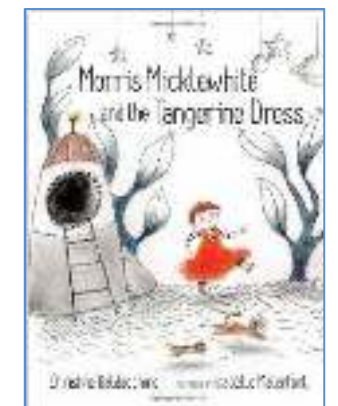
Who says transgender identity can’t be explained to young children? In **My New Mommy**, by Lilly Mossiano and Sage Mossiano, four-year-old Violet has a transitioning father who carefully walks her—and us—through the process. Like Daye and Johnson, Mossiano was frustrated with the lack of children’s materials, so she took matters into her own hands. She challenged herself to make the content accessible to a young audience, but the real challenge is the one she posed to traditional portrayals of gender in children’s books.



Call Me Tree, by Maya Christina Gonzalez, is the third book in a trilogy that opted for gender neutral pronouns, providing what the writer called a “much needed break from the constant boy-girl assumptions and requirements.” Gonzalez took another decisive step away from the “gay parent” trend and gave us an unambiguously ambiguous gender-queer character. Her engagement with the Chicano identity also departed from the classic whiteness of LGBTQ children’s characters.



Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress by Christine Baldacchino and Isabelle Malenfant. Like Bailey in *10,000 Dresses*, Morris has a penchant for gender-queer behavior. He loves to wear the title’s orange garment but his fashion choices leave him open to relentless teasing from his classmates. Tensions escalate, and Morris becomes physically ill from the psychological pain. Though his imagination helps him triumph in the end, the book’s real triumph is that it gives a harsh and realistic account of queer bullying.



Health Tips of the Month

Want to be smarter?

Like your poached egg and whole-wheat toast in the morning? Your brain might enjoy it, too. Eating selenium-rich foods, like eggs, could help keep your memory sharp and your brain speed on high as you age. In rural China, researchers found that elderly people who got at least the U.S. recommended daily value of selenium (about 55 micrograms per day) had cognitive test scores that put them in a league with people 10 years younger. You can get your daily dose of selenium by eating whole-wheat bread (10 micrograms per slice), eggs (14 micrograms per egg), tuna (63 micrograms per 3 ounces), Brazil nuts (270 micrograms per half ounce), and many other foods. In other words, you don't have to go overboard with eggs, and probably shouldn't, to get your fill.



Strengthen your immune system:

Exercise can help boost your immune system and keep sickness at bay. People who exercise tend to have fewer colds and other respiratory infections than people who aren't active. Exercise leads to an increased production of antibodies and T-cells, both of which help the immune system by hunting down and killing antigens. Exercise also increases happiness, and studies show that happy people are more resistant to illness. But don't overdo it; intense exercise actually weakens the immune system in the recovery period after such exertion, leaving you susceptible to germs. Exercise (like brisk walking) helps improve your resistance to the common cold. In a study, 115 sedentary and overweight women were assigned to do either 45 minutes of moderate intensity exercise or 45 minutes of stretching 5 days weekly for one year. Before starting the study, women in both groups reported having the same number of colds. On average, women exercised about three and one-half days per week during the year of the study. Over the year, women doing moderate exercise experienced a modestly decreased risk of having a cold, while colds increased slightly in those doing only stretching. During the final three months of the study, the risk of colds was over three times higher among women doing just stretching compared with those doing daily aerobic exercise. So get exercising and give your tissue box a rest!



Men's Health: Great Sex at Any Age

Trouble performing in the bedroom? You're not alone. It's estimated that 1 in 10 men worldwide suffers from erectile dysfunction (ED), which is an inability to get or maintain an erection. If this sounds like you, check your middle. Belly fat doesn't just spell trouble for your heart and blood vessels. Having a spare tire is horrible for your love life, too.

How does belly fat affect you below the belt? Deep abdominal fat, known as omentum fat, takes up residence around your liver and other vital organs. When fat is released from the omentum, some of it goes straight to your liver and then on to your arteries. And omentum fat can do serious damage to your blood vessels. Clogged arteries and blood vessels reduce blood flow not just to your heart but also to other critical organs, including your genitals. Without good circulation down there, men can have trouble getting or maintaining an erection. And both men and women need increased blood flow in sensitive areas to maximize sexual pleasure. Did you know? Carrying as little as 9 extra pounds increases your risk of ►



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The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist
Kinship International, Inc.

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Printing : Doolittle's PrintServe

The *Connection* is published by Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141 USA. Submissions are welcome and may be directed to the editor at connectioneditor@sdakinship.org or mailed to the principal office address above. Include your name as you want it published along with your address and telephone number(s).

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Health Tips of the Month

► blood vessel damage (and heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers). The good news? It doesn't take much to turn up your fat-burning furnace and get your energy levels, self-esteem, and sex life back on track. Here are four easy steps to lose belly fat fast:

- 1. Walk more.** Walking is one of the best exercises for minimizing that gut. Taking a brisk 30-minute walk every day helps keep your fat cells from expanding. Burn even more belly fat by adding 10 minutes of weight training twice a week; increasing muscle mass will whittle your middle even faster.
- 2. Grab a tape measure.** Waist size may be a better indicator of health than the numbers on your bathroom scale. Your waist should be a little less than half the number of inches in your height. And as a general rule, anytime a man's waist size reaches 40 inches, his health and sex life are at risk. (Women's waists should be no more than 36 inches.)
- 3. Grab the whole grains.** When it comes to foods that burn belly fat, you can't beat whole grains. And it's a pretty simple trade-off. Just replace some of the processed foods in your diet with three daily servings of 100% whole-grain cereals, breads, and pasta to lose inches off your waist.
- 4. Get your ZZZs.** In one study, dieters who slept 8.5 hours a night lost twice as much fat and retained more lean muscle compared with the folks in the study who slept only 5.5 hours nightly. The longer sleepers also burned an extra 114 calories a day. That type of additional calorie burn can translate into as much as 10 extra pounds lost a year!

Gut Check

Losing that spare tire isn't just about getting healthy. It's about living a better life and feeling your best, too. Let's face it: few things feel as good as a little extra room in your waistband. And looking in the mirror and liking what you see is a pretty great feeling, too. ▼



Kinship Germany meets at David and Werner's in Spielberg, Frankfurt, Germany



f.l.t.r. Tony, Werner, David, Hans, Tanja, Marcel, Rene (& Marcus above)



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