

The Newsletter of Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. Vol. 37, No. 8, September 2013



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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.

REGIONS AND GROUPS WORLDWIDE

www.sdakinship.org/regions-groups

CHAPLAIN

Marcos Apolonio, chaplain@sdakinship.org

CONTACT/INFORMATION

info@sdakinship.org

SUPPORT KINSHIP

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)



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.

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

Some months I know how the *Connection* will turn out. Some months I only think I know. I need to send about 18-20 pages of copy to the proofreaders to allow our layout guru enough, but not too much, material to fit into our pages. We need room for photos. This month, I just postponed six pages and two articles. It's a wonderful dilemma. I made a couple of decisions that are not my normal style. First of all, I tend to think of *Connection* articles as "reading bytes" or prose versions of haiku. I try to keep them short. Second, I like stories about or introductions to Kinship members. This is a community and I want us to get to know each other. Since we tend to look at pictures before we delve into words, you've probably already noticed that we do have photos of Kinship members. The articles, however, are from allies. Two of them are *really long*. I included Bonnie's article because I think it well describes the journey of an Adventist coming to understand the imperative of same-sex marriage. Even if we never marry, those journeys affect all of us. I included Arlene's article on hope because I believe our individual lives and the well being of our Kinship community are based on, and cannot survive without, hope. I am about to ship this off to my proofreader. I know one of them won't even look at this today. That is just the greatest news! Jacquie and her long-time partner Linda are getting legally married in San Francisco this morning, in a church. They will now have the rights, privileges, and headaches of all other legally married couples. Bless you both! Talk about hope! This has been a very long time coming for them. For the rest of us, I wish you all events, people, reading, and celebrations that keep your hope alive. As you do so, I want you each to take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine



Before I Die

is a remarkable, interactive, community project designed and advocated by Candy Champ. We invite you to take a look at this site:

<http://beforeidie.cc/>

One of our members shared her response with us.

Before I die I want to make the most of whatever time I have left. My mother is in her 80s. My cats are elderly (although one doesn't seem to know it). I hope I will live long enough and well enough to enjoy retirement. I hope to do more volunteering and read more books. Right now I'm rereading The Last Testament: A Memoir by God with David Javerbaum. Not only do I frequently LOL [laugh out loud] but the depth of his knowledge blows me away. If you get the chance check out Againesis 4:4 through chapter 5.

—Heidi Johnson, July 2013



This comes with a warning. Anytime you are near the Kinship team they will be asking you this question. You will be seeing the question in print and in the eNews and in *Connection* emails. Clearly, we are looking forward to hearing your response. You can write us at connectioneditor@sdakinship.org. ▼



I Chose Hope... and That Has Made All the Difference

©Arlene R. Taylor PhD

Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.

—Dale Carnegie

yes indeed! I owe a great deal to teachers—two in particular. Most people are impacted by their teachers, negatively or positively.

Fewer analyze and identify the impact. With some thought I was able to pinpoint how the influence of these two individuals changed the entire course of my life. Because of them I learned to hope. In fact, I may even be alive today because of them, because back then my life was not working. Being sick frequently with at least one bout of walking pneumonia annually for five years in a row, continual fatigue, experiencing my then-husband run off with my secretary, feeling as if I could never succeed at anything—no, my life was not working. I had taken a new job, hoping it would be less stressful and a better fit with my aptitudes. So far, so good. Until my first performance evaluation at my new job as director of infection control at an acute hospital.

"It's time to start working on a master's," my boss said, smiling encouragingly. I smiled back but doubt that the smile reached my eyes. How could I explain that, as much as I loved to learn, getting a Master's degree was simply not in the cards? Not for me. I wasn't very smart. Besides, I would have to take a statistics class. And pass. And my brain didn't do math. My boss wouldn't let it go. She kept bringing the topic up and I kept making excuses.

Enter Terrence Roberts PhD, or "Doc T," as I thought of him.

In a serendipitous coincidence, my boss asked Doc T to provide some lectures, assessment, analysis, and personal feedback to middle-management personnel. As a member of the faculty at a local four-year college and director of Behavioral Health at the acute hospital where I worked, he was eminently qualified to do so. At our first one-to-one meeting, he asked about the stressors in my life and what I planned to do, career-wise, with the rest of my life. I laughed (not a happy laugh), tearing up as I repeated the pressure I felt to enroll in a Master's program. I detailed the whole litany of reasons this wouldn't work for my brain and concluded by reiterating the fact that there was no hope of my ever accomplishing something like that. I was lucky to be doing as well as I was (which, by the way, was not doing very well at all, but I didn't know the difference at that stage of my life^¾believing that struggle, illness, and exhaustion were what adulthood was all about). Astutely, Doc T must have seen through my convoluted and constricted thinking.

I have little recollection of anything he explained about my Johari-Window results. I do remember his posing half a dozen questions and suggesting I find time over the next few weeks to arrive at answers. Over time I've come to believe there are few accidents in life—just

opportunities that we so often miss. Doc T was one of my great opportunities. Fortunately, I didn't miss that one! I already held him in great professional regard, knowing that he had been one of the Little Rock Nine, one of a group of African-American students who had been enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957. I figured that if he could survive that unspeakable hardship and abuse and go on to get a PhD, I could trust that he must know something. Maybe even something that could help *me*. After all, what did I have to lose?

I took his questions one by one and tried to answer them against the backdrop of my life experiences to date.

- *What made me think I was not smart?*

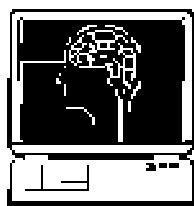
That one was easy. First, I'd always felt "different" from others—in a minority category in so many ways. Second, when I made comments at the dinner table, family members frequently laughed. It had never occurred to me that I might actually have said something rather witty. And third, as I listened to other people talk, my brain's perception of the topic often differed from theirs. Greatly! In my brain, these and a hundred other examples had come to be equated with *not smart*.



• *How did I know my brain didn't do math?*

That was one easy, too. At age 16, taking trigonometry by correspondence, I had actually equaled my age on the final-exam grade. 16%. My mother had been horrified. "When I was your age," she had said more than once, "I scored a perfect 100% on my trig final. How could I have a daughter who flunked? If you didn't look so much like your father and me I'd think the hospital had given us the wrong newborn..." And so it went between sighs and moans. That 16% score, coupled with my mother's bewilderment, had translated into, *I'm math illiterate*. After that I had simply accepted the fact that my brain just didn't do math. It could do other things: write verse and short stories, sight-read music very well and play several instruments, brainstorm new games, problem solve on the spur of the moment, glide around the ice rink...it didn't do math.

• *What stories had I heard over the years about my abilities?*



That one was harder. I had been homeschooled for nine of my K-12 years. My internal explanation for being home

school was that my parents thought I wouldn't be successful in a real school setting (although that had never been verbalized). At home I was the only student, and my "home school teacher" (my mother) was a very high-IQ adult. A continual emphasis on missed test questions, versus affirmation for the ones I had gotten correct, contributed to a sense that "I couldn't get it right." There was also a big push for me to work on areas of weakness, rather than concentrating on what my brain did energy-efficiently. Current brain function rhetoric strongly suggests that such an antiquated view is not only unhelpful over the long term but also can contribute to multiple problems ranging from an increased risk of illness, to manag-

ing one's weight, to a potential decrease in longevity. But that information—in the era of brain imaging—was half-a-century away. So, concentrating on tasks that were difficult for my brain to accomplish led me to believe that my abilities were few and far between, and the ones I did have were not particularly admired or rewarded.

• *Did I know the stories I was telling myself about my abilities?*

No, not until Doc T suggested I identify them. They weren't pretty, those stories. They related primarily to fears of what I could NOT do successfully. Fears related to what others would think, of not fitting in, that my mother would die of breast cancer, that my father would not recover from "jaundice" (Hepatitis A), that I would forget the music for the piano recital (rote memorization being very energy-exhausting for my brain), and on and on. No wonder I was tired and sick and sick and tired. I had obviously accepted the mantra of fear as my own. That's a load for any brain to carry!

• *Had I grown up in an optimistic or pessimistic environment?*

I grappled with this question. Using the definition that optimism is a conclusion reached through a deliberate thought pattern that leads to a positive attitude, I had to conclude that my childhood environment veered toward the pessimistic side. For as far back as I could recall, the comments and instructions directed toward me had been couched in the negative: don't, can't, shouldn't, oughtn't, won't, and so on. Much later in life I would be told by a brain-function specialist that although no family is ever truly functional in all aspects, there are degrees of dysfunctionality. In a mildly dysfunctional family, estimates are that children hear nine or ten negatives for every positive. Double that for a moderately dysfunctional family environment and triple it for an environment considered to be outright dysfunctional. People tend to do what they have

experienced and you can only pass on what you know. Therefore it's no wonder pessimism can be transmitted down the generational corridor.

• *What had happened in my life to deprive me of hope?*

That one definitely set me back on my heels. Until then I hadn't even realized that I had none. According to Erik H. Erikson, the well-known developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst who postulated that a human being goes through eight stages from birth to death, hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive. If life is to be sustained, hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded or trust impaired. Hopefulness is the clear sense that something I wished for might actually occur, that what I wanted might be possible. Somewhere during my childhood I had stopped wishing or wanting—just plodding along, one foot in front of the other, not thinking about anything I didn't already have. Double ouch!

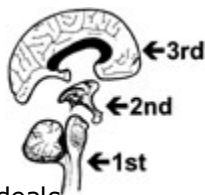
It was several weeks before Doc T and I chatted about these six questions. It was even longer before I found the courage (at his suggestion) to take an IQ test. Part of me said it was better to wonder how non-smart I was than to have my beliefs confirmed. If Doc T hadn't kept encouraging me whenever our paths crossed in the hospital cafeteria I might never have screwed up the courage. His premise was that my score would fall within the bell curve of distribution and that, with a good teacher, there was every reason to believe I could pass statistics. *Right*. The teacher could not be the issue. I'd taken a correspondence course, for heaven's sake and a teacher must have written the course. The issue was my brain's inability to do math. That was *my story* and I stuck to it.

In retrospect, it is amazing how tenaciously we are wont to hang on to our stories and interpret everything that happens in their light. Eventually (about nine months later)

I showed up in Doc T's office to take an IQ test and returned a few weeks later to learn the results. Eyes twinkling, Doc T told me that my score was definitely above 85—that being the lower end of the first deviation from the mean on the Bell Curve of Distribution. This removed all doubt (his words) about whether or not my brain could wrap itself around statistics. "The issue," he pointed out, "is whether you can alter your perception enough to risk taking a statistics course. I think you've given up hope." He was right. I had. But at his words the dim outline of a door marked *hope* began to materialize in my mind.

More time went by as I tried to picture my life differently, as I tried to rewrite parts of the script I had been handed at birth. Looking back, I was dragging my feet on the one hand. On the other, it gave me time to consider and reconsider the beliefs and attitudes I had consciously and subconsciously absorbed—many of them no doubt before the age of three. I was struggling to develop new habits of joy in an effort to change my mindset from pessimistic to optimistic. Once again this brilliant teacher came to my rescue. Drawing on a paper napkin during a lunch break, he introduced me to Paul MacClean's *Triune Brain Model*.

Basically, think of the brain as three functional layers: two subconscious and one conscious. The brain thinks in pictures and deals easily with positives—a one-step process. What you see is what you get. The 3rd brain layer can process negatives, but it is a challenge—a two-step process—that involves the reverse of an idea. There's a huge difference between "Don't touch the stove" and "Keep your hands away from the stove." What you think in the conscious third layer filters down to the second and first layers and provides a map for them to follow. (The first and second layers are unable to use language, but they can perceive language.) And here's the rub. The first and second brain layers may be unable to process



negatives at all. That's the reason affirmation is considered to be the programming language of the brain, the most effective way to communicate with the subconscious layers. It was a slow process to learn to recognize a thought as negative and figure out a way to state it as a positive. Slow but possible!



Day arrived when, during one of our lunch visits, Doc T tossed a college summer-school bulletin across the table and casually remarked, "Go register for statistics. Keep it a secret, if you want to. When you pass you can enroll next fall in a Master's program."

"And if I don't?" I asked, half seriously and half in jest.

"Get a math tutor and retake the class." He was nothing if not direct. "Go ahead. Risk it."

Risk it?

I looked up information on risk. One person defined it as a function of three variables:

- probability that a threat exists
- probability that there are significant vulnerabilities
- potential impact of the vulnerabilities

If any of these three variables approaches zero, the overall risk approaches zero. My conclusions were that there was no real threat—only the possibility that I wouldn't make a "C grade" and someone else would find out about it. The only vulnerabilities were my abilities and my own perceptions. The impact of those vulnerabilities? Hmm-m-m.

Doc T triggered the first major change in my life.

It changed for the second time when I met Dr. Bill Hoyer. Already teaching at Golden Gate University, he had agreed to teach a Statistics course at the local junior college. Along with 58 other adult learners, I signed up for his class. Believe me, I kept it a secret. The only people who knew were my immediate

family members (I would be in Statistics class four nights a week for the next six weeks and spending every available minute studying) and my best friend in San Francisco.

And then it was ground zero. I slipped into the lecture hall. Dr. Hoyer was middle-aged and bearded, with a PhD in mathematics. *Wow! What a brain he must have!* Filled with apprehension, I snuck over to a desk at the back of the room and did all those nervous little things I would have preferred to avoid: dropping my pen, knocking over my bottle of water, stuttering out my name when the instructor reached my desk creating a roster.

"What is your reason for taking this class?" asked Dr. Hoyer. "You look like you're headed for the guillotine." *Perceptive man*, I thought to myself. The class laughed. Blushing, I explained that my boss was pushing me to get a Master's degree, that statistics was a pre-requisite, and that my brain did not do math—unfortunately. Looking at me from the corner of one eye, he calmly and deliberately tapped his pen on my desk. "Your brain will do math in my class," he said, matter-of-factly. *It would?* A tiny crack appeared in my door marked *hope*. From then on I thought of him as Doc H, only the H stood for hope.

During the next six weeks my brain worked beyond diligently. It over-learned, but I was still terrified that, when push came to shove, it might not have learned enough to pass. I doubt I've ever been as stressed in any other class, before or since. I know that no other class has ever been as impactful!

I still can recall in living color how my brain felt in his presence. He *believed* that my brain could pass his statistics course and I slowly absorbed some of his certainty. To my amazement, the classes sped by. My brain not only seemed to "get it" at some level but also started looking forward to solving some of the statistical problems, many involving aspects of epidemiology, an area of study that intrigued me due to my background in public health. As each class morphed into the

next, terms such as probability, reliability, mean, median, mode, and p-values actually took on some meaning. Gradually my apprehension lessened and my interest in the subject grew. Doc H made it relevant. The crack in the door marked *hope* opened wider.

Each week there was a quiz. "Think of them," Doc H explained, "as tools to tell you what you have already learned and what you still need to figure out." *What a concept!* "Your final exam will be your grade." *Oh, oh. Everything was riding on the final.* Hope plummeted.

One evening toward the end of class, Doc H happened to be near my desk for one of his famous informal chats. He had a habit of wandering around the room and engaging students in conversation. His question to me was whether I knew what had triggered my math phobia. *Phobia? Did I have a phobia? Not me.* "So many bright women have one," he said, "and so often it is a figment of their imagination, albeit based on a real experience." My face must have mirrored puzzlement because he continued. "What they do is take one incident and build any aspect of their self-concept around it."

In response to his question I told my 16% final-exam story, much as I had with Doc T. When Doc H found out that I had been taking trigonometry by correspondence he fairly howled with mirth. "That is simply rich," he roared, the hairs in his beard quivering as he went into gales of laughter. "You tried to teach yourself trigonometry and thought your brain did not do math? Oh, the stories we tell ourselves!" Somehow his laughter was infectious and soon we were all laughing as if it was the biggest joke in the world instead of the greatest tragedy in my math life to date.

"A student's success in math is a function of how well the teacher teaches," Doc H said decisively, when the laughter had died down. "And my brain's opinion (that phrase would become a life-time favorite) is that the overwhelming majority of individuals need a

teacher. Trig by correspondence?" And he shook his head and burst out laughing all over again.

*Y*ears later I would discover that study after study confirmed his opinion:

- The quality of the classroom teacher is the single most important factor in predicting student success.
- **Teacher quality more heavily influences differences in student performance than does race, class, or school of the student.**
- A teacher's knowledge of math matters for student learning in math at all school levels, but especially at the secondary level. Teachers who are more math-knowledgeable produce better student math achievement.

I chose to forego the family's annual 4th of July camping trip on the Mendocino coast. Oh, I went, but rather than lazy days of light reading on a chaise lounge listening to the music of the wind in the trees and the slap of water against the rocks, I studied. Statistics. Only the studying didn't seem the drudgery I had initially imagined. Images not only flashed onto the screen of my mind when I thought about the bell curve of distribution, probability formulas, and statistical significance, but the pictures made sense. During breaks from study I began to throw around possible topics for a Master's program. *Imagine! Doc H had convinced me I could pass.* By the end of the camping trip I had my topics narrowed down to epidemiology and adult education—if I got a "C," of course. Hey, might as well go for a double major while I was at it!

The final exam was scheduled on the next-to-the-last night of class. Dr. Hoyer planned to score the papers over the weekend and give out grades the following Monday. It was a timed test. As I did a quick scan of the exam I was surprised to note that the questions seemed familiar, and I thought I knew the answers. At least most of them. If it had been almost any subject but math, I would have considered *passing* a

done deal. All I needed was a solid "C" to get accepted to grad school. Finishing well within the time frame, I turned in my paper and went home. To *hope*. Well, to agonize, if truth be told.

*M*onday night a large sheet of paper was taped to the blackboard. It was hiding the list of students who achieved a grade of C or higher. When everyone was settled in their seats, Doc H said he had enjoyed the last six weeks and expected we would be as successful in our next educational endeavor. He knew we could be. I heard virtually none of it. *Blah, blah, blah*, my brain thought. *Let's get to the scores and find out if he really knows what he has been talking about: that a student's success in math is a function of the teacher's ability to put the subject across in a way that enables learning.*

Doc H removed the paper. A list of names sprang into view, arranged in descending order of the number of points received out of a possible 500, along with the point spread for each letter grade. I looked for my name at the bottom of the list. *I only need a C!... Not there.*

My eyes moved up the list of C's. My name was not there. *That must mean I got a D*, I thought. And I really had tried! *Oh well. How kind of him NOT to list my name, sparing me some humiliation.*

"YES!" The word exploded into the silence. It came from Yan, a young Asian immigrant who was taking one evening class after another in his quest for a degree, all the while working fulltime to support a wife and daughter. "YES!" he shouted again.



Dr. Hoyer smiled and said, "Congratulations, young man! You earned 500 out of a possible 500 points." We all clapped.

Turning to me, Dr. H continued, "And you, young lady, aren't you proud of yourself?"

"Yes," said Yan, "you give me running for my dollars." *No one mentioned he meant a run for my money.*

My face must have mirrored total confusion. "My name isn't on the board," I managed to squeak out.

"Yes it is," they chorused in unison.

"Perhaps you didn't look high enough," Doc H said, glancing at me from the corner of one eye as he slowly moved his finger inexorably upward beside the list of 58 names. Through the C's. Past the B's. Into the A's. *Into the A's?* Up, up, up until it finally stopped at the second name from the top. The second name from the top was my name. *It wasn't possible!*

Arlene Rose Taylor: 499 points—A+.

Qhad never exhibited behaviors even close to the famous *vapors*, but for a few moments I actually feared I was going to pass out. *499 points? I'd missed a perfect score by 1 point?* My mouth gaped open in disbelief. *Unbelievable!*

In the moment of silence that followed, Yan patted my shoulder awkwardly and repeated a story he had heard in childhood. It seems, eons ago, a famine had struck a remote area of China. A father, seeing that he and his children would

not live much longer since all their food was gone, filled some bags with ashes. Tying them with ropes from the ceiling, he told his little children, "There is roasted corn in those bags, but we have to save it for the future." Time passed and the father died of hunger. The children survived long enough to be rescued. They survived because they believed they had food. Their father died because he had lost hope.

"Your brain can do math, young lady," Dr. Hoyer said. "In fact, your brain can probably do most anything you need it to do—if you *think* it can."

Qn that instant the course of my adult life altered. Passing the statistics course and enrolling in graduate school was the least of it. Dramatically, albeit slowly, my brain's perceptions changed. I came to understand the power of my own expectations to either limit or enable. And although I never saw Doc H again, during those six weeks of summer school I had experienced the power of another brain believing in mine, completely and unequivocally. Incontrovertible lessons—that changed my life forever.

A couple of earned doctoral degrees, several published books later, and a rewarding career that has taken me around the world speaking about brain function have conspired to convince me that no one is an island. In the words of John Donne, "Each is surrounded by a continent." These two teachers, Doc T and Doc H, formed part of the continent around me. Their lessons

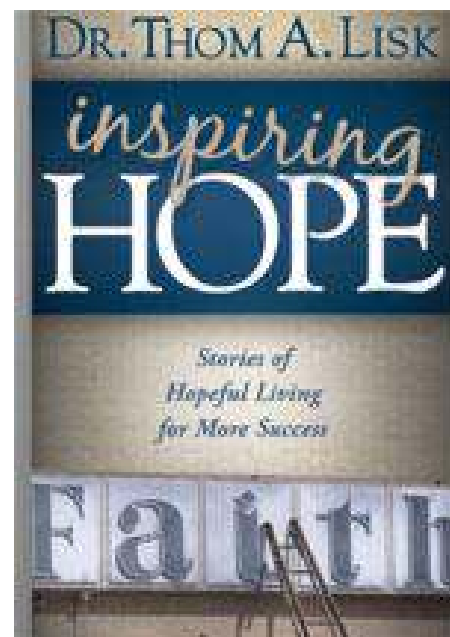
positively impacted my life in ways too numerous to count. They have my undying gratitude. Oh, I know my brain did the work—no one could do the work for me. But I also know that Doc T and Doc H exemplified the marine saying, *Ductus Exemplo* (leadership by example). They gave me hope and affirmed me to success.

Hope. The only blessing that remained in the Babrius jar, all that was left in Pandora's box.

Hope. The quintessential catalyst, waiting to be chosen, to be embraced.

Christopher Reeve was right: "Once you choose hope, anything's possible."

Thanks to these two gifted teachers, I chose hope—and that has made all the difference. ▼



You are Invited to our Fifth Annual Book and the Beach Mini - Kampmeeting September 19-22, 2013 — North Carolina!

Sandfiddler Beach House, Nags Head

We're having an unexpected response to our September Mini-Kampmeeting! Our project for that weekend is to "develop a theology" along with some adventures, dolphins, discussions, worship, play, and wonderful meals. The books to be discussed this year are *Zechariah*, *Horton Hears a Who*, and *The Mousehole Cat*. Be sure to register now to reserve your space!

Cost for room, food, programs, and dolphin watch is \$ 150.00 per person.

For more information, you can contact Catherine at Region1@sdakinship.com or at 413 325-3648.



You are invited to our 8th Annual Vermont Mini-Kampmeeting! 7—10 November

It will be held at a rambling, comfortable Victorian home in Ludlow near one of Vermont's most scenic ski mountains. We will have access to a wide range of historic and artistic activities.

This year we have the opportunity to have our Sabbath worship in an Adventist heritage church, weather permitting. We are quite excited that we have a new pastoral ally

who will be joining us, with her family. Our focus for this year continues to be *Building Sanctuary*. There will be the usual morning Prayer, Praise, Promise, and Pajamas worship; Sharing Circle; and unexpected surprises.

Go to <http://sdakinship.org/en/events.html> and click on the selected event in the left-side menu.

For more information, please feel welcome to contact Catherine at Region1@sdakinship.org or 413 325-3648.



*EKM Holiday greetings from
Ivan, Ruud, Stefan, Melanie,
Kees, Catherine, Joachim, and
Mike (photographer) in Portugal!*

The Face of Love: Defending (Gay) Marriage from a Christian Perspective



By Bonnie McLean

I've wanted to write this for a long time. Somehow, time, energy, and effort—or courage—has failed me. No longer! I want to defend marriage—marriage for *all* consenting adults

First, I would like to go over some Bible verses that have often been used to clobber gays and lesbians. From the Garden of Eden to Paul's condemnation of certain behaviors, there are all kinds of verses that Christians have used to defend the "marriage of men and women only" stance. I'd like to reopen them for consideration. I want to go beyond a formalist, literalist reading of these verses, placing them within context of the passage, chapter, and book, as well as discussing the reasons for these verses' inclusion in the Bible. I am going to look at cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. After the biblical discussion, I would like to offer a more personal defense. I, a Bible-following Seventh-day Adventist Christian, openly and honestly defend gay marriage. I do so as a civilian in my country and a member of my church. I will share pieces of my own thought process, about how my own homophobia eventually withered in the face of Christ-centered love.

Part I: For the Bible Tells Me So

Below are seven key texts that have been used to "prove" marriage is only between a man and a woman. I say "prove," because I believe some of these verses have been taken out of context and that the Bible is not always as cut-and-dried as those of us who follow it would like to think. I will be quoting the New King James Version of the Bible.

[I have deleted all verse numbers in quoted Bible passages]
Genesis 2 (especially verses 18 and 24) reports the creation and union of Adam and Eve. Verse 18 states, "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" We're not meant to be celibate. As of yet, that helper (or in the King James Version, helpmeet)

has not been described in detail.

If we look at verse 24, it more clearly declares, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." That's not too much of a surprise, either. As some Bible believers are quick to promote, this is God's idealized roadmap: marriage between a man and a woman.

That said, let's consider some ways in which the Edenic model was "violated" after the entrance of sin: different races, cultures, and languages; eating animals; eating green vegetables; polygamy; slavery; shortened life spans; and weakened human forms.

Clearly, sin threw many things off the idealized balance, some of which are condemned and some that are not. Using this passage to decry homosexuality ignores a much larger picture. We have *all* sinned, been affected by sin, and fallen short of God's glory. We are covered only in the grace brought about Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 3:22-24). Whatever our sexual orientation, Christian folks are *just as much in need of grace* as the rest of the world.

Today, the terms Sodom, sodomy, and sodomite have been conflated with homosexual, and thus, all verses with the words "sodomite" have been translated to mean same-sex attractions. I would argue, based on the context where many of these verses take place, it's a matter of hermeneutics and translation, and not at all related to LGBTI people.

References to Sodom begin in Genesis 13:10-13 and Genesis 19. In Genesis 13, Abraham and Lot have each amassed much wealth in livestock. They agree to part company in order to maintain harmony within, and space for, their respective camps. Lot chooses the plain of the Jordan River, on which the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are located. In verse 13, the Bible reports, "The men of Sodom were exceed-

ingly wicked and sinful against the Lord." We are not told the nature of those sins.

Genesis 19 becomes more explicit. Negotiations between the Lord and Abraham finally reveal Sodom will be destroyed because there are not even ten righteous people who live there. Two angels are sent to Lot's house to warn him and his families of the impending destruction and to remove them from the city. Lot finds these angels, disguised as men, while sitting in the gates of Sodom. He presses them to have supper and lodging at his house.

But "before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them *carnally*.' So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, and said, 'Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof'" (Genesis 19:4-8).

Heteronormative instincts often jump on the phrase "carnal knowledge" and say, "Well, that's what makes them Sodomites." However, to protect his guests, Lot offered up his daughters. Clearly, what we're dealing with is not gay sex, but sexuality used in an orgiastic sense. If Lot (for reasons few parents today

would understand) believed his daughters were an acceptable substitute, the context would indicate that these men were looking for sex wherever they could force it.

My research has led me to understand that, in the desert in ancient times, moral codes demanded that strangers and guests be protected at all costs. The rapacious men at Lot's door are condemned because they violated the hospitality code with no care for the harm they would cause.

I Kings 14:24 mentions the wicked reign of Rehoboam: "And there were also perverted persons in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel." "Perverted persons" in Hebrew actually means "*qadesh*, that is, one practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals." The context and linguistics indicate that the writer was referring to pagan religious practices in the land. The same wording and meaning also occurs, in I Kings 15:12, I Kings 22:46, and II Kings 23:7, with an allusion to sodomites in I Timothy 1:10.

In Ezekiel 16:49, God, through his prophet, actually chides Israel for being more wicked than both Samaria and Sodom. According to Ezekiel, God said, "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit." Keep the word "abomination" in



mind. We're going to talk about that soon.

Jude 7 uses Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of sexual immorality, and going "after strange flesh" as an example of experiencing the Law's vengeance. The meaning of this text is ambiguous unless you are comparing it with Ezekiel's message.

Leviticus 18 discusses sexual morality at length. Here, God describes to Moses certain lifestyle patterns practiced in both Egypt and Canaan. He commands the children of Israel to avoid all of them.

Verses 6-18 discuss, in detail, not uncovering your relatives' nakedness. I searched through several commentaries, which seem to interpret this as incestuous relationships. Much time is spent on detailing the mother-son, father-daughter, etc. verboten encounters.

Verses 19-23 go on to say, "You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness as long as she is in her customary impurity. Moreover you shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her. And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. This is a perversion."

I recommend that you spend some time looking up the word "abomination," as it has been translated from the Hebrew: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abomination_\(Bible\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abomination_(Bible)). Or, for all references and differentiations in translation of "abomination," here's a website that does all the work for you: <http://www.dragonlordsnet.com/abomination.htm>. "Abomination" in a biblical sense did not mean the same thing that it does today.

What God Himself makes most clear, in Leviticus 18:24-29, is, "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am

casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit *any* of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people."

Because God was trying to set up a nation set apart from the other cultures around it, He outlined a very specific lifestyle for His people to follow, precisely so they would appear unique to the world.

Let me also note that God spends way more time on dietary laws (Leviticus 11), bodily discharges (Leviticus 15), and leprosy (Leviticus 13-14) than He does on same-sex encounters. In fact, He mentions having sex during one's period in the same passage as "gay" sex. So, I don't exactly see Evangelicals going round and putting women in red tents during their periods (unless, of course, it's an underground society). Nor do I see the Evangelicals mobbing Red Lobster, stoning people for eating or cooking shellfish, lobster, and crab.

In Deuteronomy 23:17-18, God states that there will be no ritual harlot or a "perverted" son of Israel in the nation, declaring, "You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God." My footnotes declare that these refer to the *qedeshah* (feminine of the *qadesh*) and the *qadesh*, which means those practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals. Other translations of the Bible refer to a "dog" as a male prostitute, or a sodomite (which we've established in meaning). Revelation 22:15 also refers to a "dog" in conjunction with

sexual immorality.



The apostle Paul, who can certainly seem like an old curmudgeon, has lots to say. Let's start with this passage in Romans 1:26-27, where Paul decries the ungodliness and unrighteousness of certain unidentified men. "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due."

What's happening here? If you look you will notice that the men are turning away from female partners they already have. Their lust has become so enlarged that they have sex with everyone! Pagan orgies were probably also on Paul's mind. In Greece and Rome, around Europe, and in the Middle East people used sexual promiscuity for religious rituals. I don't think it's right to say God hates homosexuality, using this passage; Paul's focus appears to be on greed and idolatry.

Translation comes into play when we study 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Paul declares, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit

the kingdom of God.”

The Greek word, translated into English here as “homosexuals” means “catamites.” Catamites were young, beautiful boys who became companions of older men, and who were often groomed for sexual purposes. They were children who were used for sex. This was a violation of the vulnerable, something the Bible has already condemned.

1 Corinthians 7:2-16 refers to Paul’s treatise on marriage, using man/woman language. No surprise here; in a cultural context it’s just a way of referring to marriage partners. In my opinion, there’s nothing that outright makes gay marriage unbiblical, nor is this something to be used as a weapon to disprove its civil legitimacy. But interestingly enough, Paul does say in verses 8 and 9, “But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is

better to marry than to burn with passion.” I don’t have an articulate exegesis; I just found the comment fascinating. I cannot find anything Jesus said about same-sex marriage.

He does briefly mention celibacy and categorizes the different kinds of “eunuchs.” “For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it” (Matt. 19:12). So, lest we think that all gay people should become eunuchs or celibate, allow for a little compassion, as Jesus does. Not everyone was made to be celibate, nor does that same rule apply to all individuals. Therefore, to those who declare that in order to be in the church, our LGBT members must be celibate, I respond, “Let him who has no sin cast the

first stone” (John 8:7). Don’t prescribe what you yourself are unwilling to do!

My findings from the Bible are not conclusive. I think that’s okay. If I am searching, praying, and dialoguing, then I am engaging with God’s Word. I believe it’s good to recognize the incongruities and contradictions that arise when we study. I don’t think we can lambast gays and lesbians with Leviticus 18, especially if we’re mixing our fabrics, eating meats God declared unclean, and not undergoing cleansing rituals after each period. The Bible is not to be cherry-picked!

I think about Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” If we are all one in Christ, I think it’s time to treat each other equally.

Part II: All About Love

I never thought about my sexuality. I just knew I liked boys. In a similar vein, I grew up Christian without knowing too much about what my beliefs entailed. It wasn’t until I was 15, facing my mom’s cancer diagnosis, that I actually started to take my faith seriously, and took personal accountability for my own spirituality.

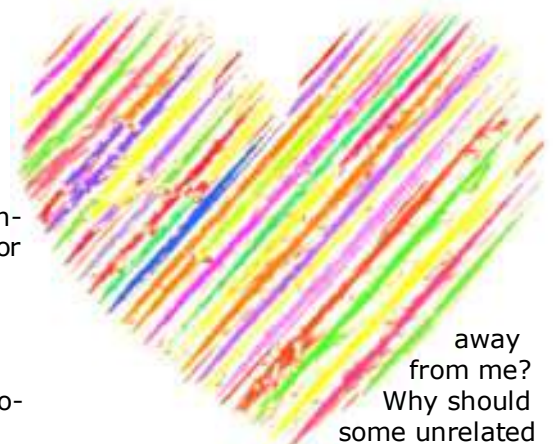
At age 22 I began to understand the complexities of human sexuality. I’d grown up believing that homosexuality was a choice. However, I didn’t choose *my* sexuality. I just recognized it, and at a very young age. How could someone who was LGBTI be so different from me that they could “choose” their orientation? A dear friend came out to me in the fall of 2007. Her revelation forced me, head on, to come to terms with my homophobia. I realized my ignorant, hateful behavior could affect someone about whom I cared deeply. I set out to educate myself, learn as much as I could, and take it to God in prayer. Above all, I needed to love my friend. She

is a no worse a sinner than I am, a peer, an equal. I have asked honest and frank questions, praying for an open mind and a devotion to God’s will.

My opposite-sex marriage and those of my friends have demolished the last shreds of my own homophobia. I learn from watching them. I witness a loving, unselfish relationship. I marvel at how well-matched the partners are. They show me what a *great* marriage looks like. They have endured the devastating loss of a child. They nurture the tremulous hope of parenthood again. They strengthen each other and inspire me to be a better person.

When I married Justin I began to understand love for God and for another in ways I cannot explain. Marriage is a divine mystery that I still find myself dazzled by. I am with someone who understands me almost as well (better, sometimes!) as I understand myself.

Why would I let anyone try to mandate this mystery or take it



away from me? Why should some unrelated person vote on my marriage? What investment do they have in my personal relationship? Why should someone else tell me that I can or cannot manage my husband’s end-of-life affairs, be part of his insurance plan, or receive benefits that belong to our marriage?

Jesus says in Luke 6:31, “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.” The Golden Rule is a lofty order. If I am serious about my faith in God, it’s what I must follow. If I don’t want someone taking away my civil rights, then I must not take away theirs. It’s that simple.

I have been instructed to love God first and foremost, and then to

love my neighbor as I value myself (Matt. 22:36-39). That is the highest calling God can offer anyone. Thus, in loving my neighbor, I am learning to put aside ignorance, fear, and hatred. Instead, I ask God every day to fill me with His extravagant love and take action.

One last thought: I just finished reading Christopher Paul Curtis's wonderful children's novel, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. The epilogue finds Mr. Curtis addressing his young readers about civil rights. While geared towards

racial equality, I find this passage particularly relevant:

Many heroic people died in the struggle for civil rights. Many others were injured or arrested or lost their homes or businesses. It is almost impossible to imagine the courage of the first African-American children who walked into segregated schools or the strength of the parents who permitted them to face the hatred and violence that awaited them. They did it in the name of the movement, in the quest for freedom.

These people are the true American heroes. They are the boys and girls, the women and men who have seen that things are wrong and have not been afraid to ask, "Why can't we change this?" They are the people who believe that as long as one person is being treated unfairly, we all are. These are our heroes, and they still walk among us today. One of them may be sitting next to you as you read this, or standing in the next room making your dinner, or waiting for you to come outside and play.

One of them may be you. ▼

Bonnie McLean is finishing her Ph.D. program at the Univ. of Wisconsin. Her husband, Justin Ferguson, teaches English at Hinsdale Adventist Academy. They are a fantastic Adventist couple. Bonnie and Justin are strongly in favor of marriage for everyone.

— George Babcock

Some Reflections from Your Heterosexual Sister

Hi! My name is Marsha. I am a life-long Seventh-day Adventist. I am a pastor's wife. I am Catherine's friend. I have known her since I was eleven years old. She calls my husband her brother-in-law. We are like sisters.

Catherine didn't come out to our rural Adventist congregation for the first 28 years I knew her. I didn't know she was gay. Since that particular closet door opened nearly 12 years ago, I have enjoyed this new part of our journey. When I first realized she was in a same-sex relationship I got on the internet and read everything I could find about lesbians and Christianity. I came to the conclusion that this issue is not a Biblical certainty but a gray area. I never apologized to anyone for being Catherine's friend. I am vaguely aware that there have been some who felt differently. I chalk their attitudes up to ignorance.

Catherine's involvement with Kinship has given me opportunities to meet and fellowship with people I probably would not have known otherwise. I cherish the friendships I have been able to form with these dear Christian people.

I have been thinking about this journey of mine. I am not what anyone would consider to be a boisterous advocate for gay causes. I have never been to a gay pride parade, although I think I might like to go sometime. I don't really share anything political on my Facebook page, and I personally block from my home page those who become strident. I realize my Facebook friends have a number of



opinions and perspectives toward LGBTI issues. Sometimes I think it is wiser not to tip my hand until I am able to meet them personally.

Lately, I have had a number of opportunities to share my perspectives about and support for my

LGBTI friends with Adventist people of differing opinions. I do not like to get into arguments. I prefer to share information that challenges people to think about and reconsider positions which perhaps, they have never been scrutinized. Today one of my Adventist Facebook friends posted a link to a blog article that I considered to be biased. Its title was, "Identical Twin Studies Prove that Homosexuality is not Genetic." After Googling the topic and reading some other literature, I questioned the article's authenticity with this comment:

"Please keep in mind that this man did not actually perform these studies; he is just making the claim that because identical twins with both orientations exist, there can be no genetic link. That is a pretty simplistic conclusion about a complicated field of study."

These days, for the most part, I am blissfully unaware and uninvolved in church politics. That said, I am becoming more and more convinced that, in our church especially, God needs heterosexual individuals who will tactfully and patiently advocate for their gay brothers and sisters, not just in shielding them from potential hurt, but also in educating and challenging fellow believers.

For me, it is reminiscent of past discussions concern-



ing women's ordination.

Sometimes I would realize that a man I might be in a discussion with on the topic was of the opinion that anything I said didn't count because I was a woman who just didn't accept her place in life. No amount of my input would even be considered, no matter how logical and biblically based. It was then that my husband had the most influence. Progress was made, through calm and patient persistence in a Spirit-led discussion.

Heterosexual supporters must make sure that the voices of their LGBTI friends are not left in isolation. Unfortunately, there are those individuals who refuse to consider their voices, but will consider ours. Of course there are some who are called to have a louder voice than mine is right now, with a more widespread influence. But, like me, there are also those who are, at this point in their lives, called to advocate with a patient and quiet voice to individual fellow believers.

Recently a pastor's wife shared with me her discomfort with a co-worker who had a same-sex spouse. I knew that I didn't want to keep silent; I certainly didn't agree. So I replied, "Oh really? I don't feel that way. I am a Kinship supporter and I know a number of wonderful Christian people who have a same-gender spouse." I don't always know how to respond, but I have found that as I become more willing to speak, God leads me with what to say.

Tonight my appeal to other heterosexual supporters is to let God lead you into situations where you can advocate for all of His people in His church. I believe that, in so doing, your own life will be enriched. And my appeal to my LGBTI friends is to continue to seek God in your life, so that you continue to be the wonderful growing Christians that you are. Do not hide from the church family, because we need to know you and miss out on so much if we don't. ▼

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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.

Kinship float at NYC Pride



Kinship booth at SDA Camp Meeting in The Netherlands



Kinship Region 1 Zip Line Adventure



Kinship Wedding in California

(Photography by Stephen Eyer)



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