

ALEX AND ANNETTE'S STORIES

*Alex had always loved God and he was sure that meant he wasn't gay.
He just knew that when he got married God would miraculously change him.
When it didn't happen, he was devastated.*

He Knew God Would Change Him

As the organist played the familiar Mendelssohn processional, Alex stood at the front of the church watching his bride float gracefully down the aisle on her father's arm. His heart pounded and questions raced wildly through his mind. *Should I have told Annette? Is God really going to change me?*

Part of his mind concentrated on the carefully rehearsed ceremony as he stepped forward, received her hand from her father and escorted her to the altar. But his outward calm masked turmoil inside. *It's still not too late. What should I do?* Only half listening to the minister's homily, he wondered, *What would all these people think if they "knew" about me?* Many of the wedding guests had traveled long distances, coming from as far away as Europe. He thought of all the wedding presents they had received. As he contemplated the devastation it would cause if he backed out now, he felt paralyzed.

"Do you, Alex, take Annette as your wedded wife. . ." Alex's thoughts returned abruptly to the present. Stuffing down his fears, he donned his familiar mask and pretended to be excited and happy, as a bridegroom should be.

At the reception, Alex was a gracious and courteous host as Annette introduced him to the warm and vivacious members of her extended French family and he presented her to all his German aunts, uncles and cousins. Through the long, hot Texas evening the merrymaking continued, and then everyone pitched in to clean up.

But beneath Alex's festive exterior he was scared to death. He was a perfectionist, who always had the answer to every problem, but he knew he would soon be facing a situation where he felt totally helpless and inadequate. He could not forget his lifelong struggle. . .

Alex had grown up in a conservative, God-fearing Adventist home, where prayer before meals and morning and evening worship were part of his daily life. His family was important to him, and he loved hearing stories about his many German relatives.

He also remembered always feeling "different" as he grew up. Part of this, he supposed, was because he was an Adventist, but there had been something else, too—something he couldn't really put his finger on. He remembered looking at the Sears and Roebuck catalog as a boy and being especially drawn to the pictures of men. He wanted to look like them, be like them. The attraction he felt was emotional more than sexual.

Through the years, as church, society, and school programmed him for marriage, for being a good husband and father, there had been a little voice inside telling him that his

real feelings were contrary to what he was being taught. As he reached puberty, that voice had grown louder and more insistent.

It had all been so confusing! Alex had heard that homosexuality was a sin, but he loved God and knew that God loved him. Surely God wouldn't allow him to be a homosexual if that was a sin, so he decided his feelings must not be related to homosexuality.

Because of his friendliness and courtly manners he was very popular with the girls, so he thought he *must* be on the right track. Yet he continued to feel attracted to other men, not women. It was not something he had ever chosen. He had begged God to take these feelings out of his life if they really were an abomination to Him.

And then, during his first year in college, he had been drawn into a sexual encounter with another guy and he finally knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that what he had feared all his life was true. But he loved the Lord and knew He would not forsake him. He knew God would take away these desires when the time came. He had always expected that he would get married someday, and he was confident God would change him then.

When he started college, he had no question but that theology was to be his major. He had always enjoyed sharing his beliefs with others. He remembered riding in the back of the school bus when he was a kid and giving Bible studies to his seatmates or leading a song service. The other kids had nicknamed him "Preacher." He wanted to dedicate his life to God, so surely he couldn't be gay!

His family had never talked about sex, so he couldn't confide in them. And he couldn't talk to his friends about it, because he didn't want them to think there was something wrong with him. As he tried to understand his feelings and the experiences he began having, he rationalized that mild same-sex acting out was just a "guy" thing—having fun, exploring—sort of like "scratching an itch."

After all, it was having sex with a woman before you got married that was a sin. And he had always refrained from being intimate with women. He believed that he was saving himself for his wife, as God commanded. The things he occasionally did with guys were just practicing for the real thing, his wife. *Real* sex was for the purpose of procreation, so what went on between two guys couldn't be considered sex. He always tried to keep from becoming emotionally attached to other guys.

It was during his year abroad, at the Adventist college in Bogenhofen, Austria, that petite, pretty Annette had walked into the classroom and turned all the guys' heads. Alex worked hard to impress her and felt like the luckiest guy on earth when she chose him. He knew that God was blessing and watching over both of them.

And now, they were married. Nervously, he realized that the moment of truth had arrived. His belief that God would change him was about to be put to the test. His confidence wavered a bit. He knew that he was supposed to be manly but gentle, to know just what to do. Annette was a good girl who had never had any previous sexual experience, so it was up to him. The pressure was on to perform well, but it didn't come naturally.

Still, up till the last minute, he was expecting that bells would go off and his world would dramatically change. When nothing happened, dismay and utter devastation flooded over him. But he couldn't let Annette know how he felt. He had to keep on pretending.

After that experience, he let Annette be the one to initiate sex. They did have sex, but it wasn't all that great, and certainly not as often as most newlyweds. It was more like a chore to get over with than all-night passionate abandonment.

From the moment Alex realized God hadn't changed him, he spent every day wondering how he was going to tell Annette and what her reaction would be. He felt pulled in two directions. He wanted her to know, yet he didn't want to lose her. He began dropping hints, but when she asked him flat out if he was gay, he lied and said he wasn't. He just couldn't face losing the one person he really loved.

But eventually, he realized he was being selfish by trying to keep their marriage going. Annette deserved to be happy with a partner who was attracted to her both physically and emotionally. She deserved someone who could be honest with her. And, he realized, he too needed someone to whom he could be attracted physically, as well as emotionally, someone with whom he could be honest.

And finally, he came to the place where he just couldn't keep it bottled up inside any longer without going crazy! On a Friday evening, he and Annette were sitting on the couch after a prayer to welcome the Sabbath.

"Let's take a walk," suggested Alex, with a now-or-never feeling of boldness. Hand-in-hand, they strolled through the dusky twilight to a nearby park. Alex hopped up on a picnic table and helped Annette up beside him. Leaning his elbows on his knees, Alex looked down at the stick he had picked up and was playing with nervously.

Quickly, before he could lose his courage, he blurted out, "Annette, I think maybe I'm bisexual."

For a moment, silence rang in his ears. Then he felt Annette's arm slip around his waist.

"You're really gay, aren't you, Alex?"

"Yes," he whispered. Then he looked at her with tears in his eyes. "I really do love you, Annette, but I just can't love you the way you deserve."

"Oh, Alex, I've known something was wrong for years, but I didn't know what to do about it!" Tears began to roll down her cheeks, and Alex put his arm around her shoulders and hugged her fiercely.

For the first time in his life, he told her everything, shared all the struggles he had gone through in coming to terms with his orientation. He was completely vulnerable...and Annette nurtured him, instead of turning away from him. Somehow, in that moment, they felt closer to each other than they ever had before. In their new openness, they had the best sex they'd ever had that night. But Alex knew nothing had changed inside of him.

In retrospect, he wondered if they could have made their marriage work. But he knew Annette would have a hard time trusting him, now that she knew he was gay. If he was late coming home, or she noticed him looking at another guy, she would wonder if he was cheating on her. Such doubts would probably destroy their marriage before long.

The failure of their marriage made Alex feel very sad. He hated hurting Annette. He hated hurting his parents and Annette's family, whom he had come to love very much. He realized that by trying to be the Alex they all wanted to see, instead of the real Alex, he had been living a lie.

One day before Annette left him, she told him, "It would have been easier if you were having an affair with another woman! I would know how to compete with a woman, but there's no way I can compete with another man. It's like apples competing with oranges."

After the divorce, Alex was forced to really face up to his homosexuality. Going to the Bible, he found God's love for the marginalized. It was the beginning of accepting himself. He felt as if a heavy burden had been lifted from his shoulders, and he was filled with an inner peace that was indescribable. For years he had prayed almost constantly for God to change him. Finally, he stopped praying long enough to listen to what God was saying.

After the divorce, Annette shut God out of her life and began a promiscuous lifestyle. Alex spent many tearful hours pleading with God to speak to her. Looking back, Alex felt that in some ways his marriage had been six of the best years of his life. Yet, because of the intense pain and distress breaking up had caused, he knew he wouldn't have done it over again.

Alex believes that it was the church's refusal to talk about homosexuality that made him feel he had to get married. He wishes the church would listen to and talk with its gay and lesbian members, would seek out those who have left the church and listen to their stories.

He feels very fortunate to attend an Adventist church with many loving and understanding members, but he longs for every gay and lesbian to have that experience. His prayer is that all pastors and church leaders will affirm that their homosexual members are children of God, just as they are....with no if's, and's or but's.

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Annette believed God had given her a sign that He approved of her relationship with Alex. When she realized that her marriage could never be like those of her friends, she was angry at God and decided to find fulfillment on her own terms

Angry With God

Wrapped in a white bath towel, her damp hair curling in tendrils about her face, Annette eagerly lifted the lacy white negligee her mother had given her out of the suitcase. Dropping her towel, she slipped it over her head and gazed into the mirror over the motel dresser. Excited anticipation brought color to her cheeks as she realized Alex would soon be finished with his shower.

Last night, after a long day of rehearsing and decorating the church, followed by the wedding itself and a gala reception, they had both collapsed in total exhaustion onto Alex's bed for a few hours' sleep before getting up to bid farewell to her family. Then, because Alex had not yet made definite plans for their honeymoon, they had decided to join the family caravan, which included some relatives from France, on a trip to California. A long, 15-hour day of driving had brought them from Texas to this motel in Phoenix. At last, the moment she had so long dreamed of was here!

The shower stopped. Annette could feel her heart pounding as she picked up the bottle of French perfume her aunt had given her and sprayed her throat lightly. She turned quickly as she heard the bathroom door open. There stood her handsome husband with a towel around his hips, enveloped in clouds of steam.

"Oh, Alex," she sighed in rapture. Tingling all over, she moved into his arms and lifted her face for his kiss. Pressing hard against him, she was glad she had resisted temptation and saved herself for this thrilling moment.

Kiss followed kiss, and at last, she drew him down on the bed. As they continued to kiss, the first moment of doubt assailed her. Kissing was wonderful, but it didn't seem to be going anywhere. Was there something she should be doing differently to lead to the next step? She felt awkward and unsure of herself.

Alex drew back and said, "I guess you should take off your nightgown." Self-consciously, Annette stood up and stepped out of her negligee. Then she lay down on the bed and they tried to do what they knew was supposed to come next. It wasn't a very satisfactory ending to their lovemaking, and Annette was a little disappointed. But her mother had told her it would hurt the first time.

"It will be better next time," she assured her crestfallen husband.

The next day they arrived in Loma Linda, California and found a room for the night in the medical school's dorm. It was furnished with twin beds, so Annette pushed them together and spread the top sheet and blanket over both beds.

Alex was already in bed when she came back from her shower. She sat on the edge of the bed and leaned over to kiss him, her long hair falling in a curtain around his face. He kissed back. At last, she drew away, smiling. She turned off the light and slipped into bed on the other side. Snuggling up to Alex, she began stroking his arm lightly.

"Mm, I'm so tired from all that driving," Alex murmured with a sigh.

"I know, *mon cher*," Annette kissed his shoulder tenderly.

Alex's eyes were closed and he didn't respond. *Something was wrong*. Sure, he was tired; she was, too, but not too tired to make love! She didn't know why she couldn't get him excited. Slowly, she pulled away from him. With a big sigh of disappointment, she turned over on her side. She lay awake for a long time, hoping Alex would reach over and touch her, but he didn't move.

They spent the next day touring the medical school with Annette's retinue of relatives. Upon learning that they were newlyweds, some friends of Annette's parents invited them to stay at their house that night and gave them their own bedroom.

This time, Annette was determined to try all her feminine wiles to allure Alex. She spent a long time in the bathroom fixing her hair, putting on makeup and perfume. By the time she entered the bedroom her heart was beating rapidly with anticipation. The wooden floor creaked as she tiptoed to the bed where Alex was waiting.

The room was decorated with antique furniture, and the bed squeaked loudly as she climbed in. In fact, every movement either of them made resulted in loud creaks and groans.

Alex rolled his eyes at her. Annette was self-conscious, too, and afraid the noises would be heard by their hosts. She knew nothing would happen that night, but she was terribly disappointed. Surely Alex was too, she thought, as she squeezed his hand under the covers.

After breakfast the next day, they said goodbye to Annette's family and headed for Texas. Alex had to go back to work. They drove till very late, and the only motel they could find was a sleazy place where the sheets didn't smell very clean. Disgusted, they lay on top of the bed for a few hours' sleep, then got up and continued on their way to Alex's apartment in Keene.

Once home, they had the excitement of opening, unpacking and putting away all their wedding presents. As it grew late, Alex stood up, stretched, and yawned hugely.

"You can stay up if you want to," he told Annette, "but I need to leave for work by seven in the morning, so I'd better get to bed."

Annette looked up from the box of towels she was opening, hoping Alex would give some indication of wanting her to come to bed with him, but he lightly kissed her forehead and turned toward the bedroom.

She stared after him, feeling as if cold water had been thrown in her face. *What was the matter?* This wasn't at all the way she had pictured marriage. Descriptions of married love by her friends had led her to expect ecstasy! Stars! Fireworks! She knew Alex loved her, but he didn't seem to have nearly the interest in the physical expression of it that she had.

Alex had a long commute to his job and put in 12-13-hour days. He often had to work overtime and came home even later. It seemed the only time they could find for sex was on Sunday mornings, and even then, it was always Annette who had to initiate it. She was sure something must be wrong with her. Her parents had always been extremely strict and she had never even kissed a boy before Alex. *I guess I just don't know how to be sexy enough*, she thought.

Annette was already in bed one night when Alex came home late again. He turned on the lamp and sat down on the edge of the bed with a look of anticipation on his face. Reaching into his coat pocket, he drew out a tiny miniature dachshund puppy and gently laid it on Annette's chest. She stroked its head with one finger; it was the cutest thing she had ever seen. She looked up with a delighted smile to see Alex watching her tenderly. For a moment she wondered if he was trying to make up for what was missing in their marriage.

But the months and years went by and nothing had really changed. Annette finally decided to confide in Marti, an older girlfriend at work, about her feelings of inadequacy and their disappointing sexual relationship. She still thought it must be her fault.

"Do you think Alex could be gay?" Marti asked. "My brother's gay, and Alex sounds just like him." The more Annette told her about their problems, the more convinced Marti became that this was the problem.

"You're young," she told Annette. "You have your whole life ahead of you. You need to leave him and start over."

Annette was devastated! To tell the truth, she thought God had wiped out homosexuality when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. It had never occurred to her that it might still exist today.

That night, as she thought about Marti's suggestion, a feeling of dread invaded her heart. But she decided that, whatever the problem was, she would not leave Alex. She had married him for better or worse, and she did not believe in divorce. If her lot was worse, she would still remain true to her vow.

When Marti tried to introduce her to other men, she felt disgusted. *Marti's not a church-going Christian*, Annette thought to herself. *She's giving me ungodly advice*. But Marti had aroused her suspicions and she began to notice and question things.

So she was somewhat prepared for the day, four years into their marriage when Alex asked her to sit down at the table. He seemed ill at ease.

"Annette, I have something to tell you." He paused for a long minute; then, without meeting her eyes, he blurted, "I think maybe I'm bisexual."

Annette realized what he meant. Her suspicions were confirmed. But she hastened to reassure him. "I already kind of figured that out, Alex. It's okay. I'll stay by you. We can get counseling and work things out. As long as you're willing to be faithful to our marriage and fight these feelings, I'm willing to forget the past and move on."

Annette made an appointment with a Christian counselor and they went to see him a couple of times. But she was beginning to have second thoughts. She felt cheated, as she remembered how her friends had described the exciting fulfillment of marriage. She, too, longed to feel attractive and desirable. She began noticing other men and how they reacted to her. As she began to feel the need of proving there was nothing wrong with her, she lost interest in working on her marriage.

Before long she made the decision to leave Alex and move into her own apartment. Alex went with her to look for a place and helped her move. She wondered if he felt relieved.

Anger was building inside her, especially at God. *Why God? She demanded. I saved myself for my husband, the way you commanded! Why did you let me waste my virginity on somebody who doesn't even appreciate it?*

She remembered how she had met Alex in France. Her dad was an educational administrator for the Adventist Church at the time. She had fallen in love with a man who was unacceptable to her parents, so they sent her to the Adventist College in Collonges to get her away from him.

There were 25 students from the United States that year and they all hung out together. Right away she had noticed the cute guy from Texas with the beautiful blue eyes. They had lots of fun sightseeing around France and Italy together. Because of her parents' strict upbringing, this was the first time she'd ever been able to have a boyfriend.

At the end of the year, Alex urged her to come to his school in Texas, but she had already been accepted into the nursing program in Canada, so they parted with promises to write. Annette soon decided nursing was not what she wanted and dropped out of school. Her father was upset and told her that if she wasn't going to school she had to get a job and earn her keep, so she began working at a patio furniture factory.

Alex kept calling and writing, and Annette enjoyed the attention. She had become interested in studying social work and Alex sent her a catalog from his school, showing that she could take a major in it there. After learning that her credits from Canada would be accepted, she approached her father to ask if she could go to school in Texas. He agreed and helped her apply for a loan.

While waiting to hear if her loan was approved, Annette had prayed, *Dear God, please let me know if it's your will for me to go to school in Texas and get back together with Alex. If it's not, keep my loan from being approved.* When she got word that her loan had come through, she believed it was a sign that God also approved of her pursuing her relationship with Alex.

Remembering that experience, Annette felt anger explode inside her. *Why did you let my loan be approved, God? You know I prayed about the choice of a life partner, but You*

let me think you had ordained and blessed my marriage to Alex! Why didn't you interfere in our courtship? Why God? Why? Why?

At last, she said to herself, *Okay, if that's the way life turns out when I follow God's rules, I'm going to see what happens if I do what I want to.* She decided that the idea of virginity and no premarital sex was only valid in Bible times and was outmoded today. After all, nobody buys a car without test-driving it. She wouldn't buy a pair of shoes without trying them on to see if they fit. So why would she marry a man and pledge him her undying love without first checking to see if they were sexually compatible? It made sense to her!

She developed a crush on a guy at work, and it quickly turned into a torrid love affair. Sexually, it was everything she had dreamed of, but the guy drank too much. Their relationship was off and on for the next two years. Guilt consumed her, as she realized how far her lifestyle had drifted from the way she had been raised. She felt uncomfortable in church and soon quit attending.

Believing that men could not be trusted, Annette was determined never to be deceived again. After her first affair, she continued to live a very promiscuous life, trying to find happiness in her own way. Eventually, she met Matt and began living with him. Then, through a series of providential events, Matt discovered God and he and Annette were married and baptized in 1997.

"My God is an awesome God!" Annette says today. "Against all odds, He still heals."