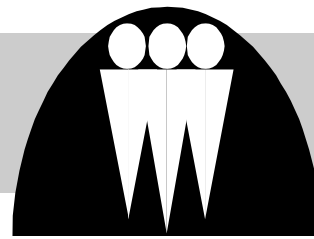


# Reunion

Spring 1995

The Family Fellowship Newsletter



Issue 4

## Family Focus

Richard and Renée Van Wagoner

We “came out” to Nick on his twenty-second birthday, three years ago. He had served an honorable mission — was released seven months before. He is brilliant, talented, hard-working, ambitious, caring, of a spiritual nature. He returned to college to finish his undergraduate degree in microbiology. In addition, he was singing and dancing in a musical theater production. He had a good job and was dating a lovely girl. Why wasn’t he happy? In fact, he seemed utterly hopeless, miserable, somewhat angry. He wanted to move away from us, from Utah. We tried talking to him but came up against a blank wall.

There are two “truths” about our knowledge of Nick’s orientation. The first is that we “knew” from his young childhood. Call it “intuition,” “gut feeling,” or maybe ... the Holy Ghost. We worried, prayed, talked to a counselor when he was around eight. She assured us that we were not the stereotypical family to “create” that kind of problem. “But, get him into boy sports.” We did and he loved soccer. I guess that nagging fear, along with my delight in being with him and his obvious delight with my companionship, made it easy to spend time with him. We did other “boy” things: rode bikes, went fly fishing and hiking and went on several long trips, including a seven-week tour of the East Coast when he was fifteen. We even took Renée along on that one. We were involved in scouting (he has his Eagle) and so much more. Never once did I mention my intermittent trepidation, nor did Renée. Although he always seemed comfortable with his male friends, he still preferred the company of girls, loved cooking, reading, theater, dancing, playing the piano and organ. Various times through those sixteen or seventeen years we anguished over our “concern,” discussed it, prayed about it, then dismissed it as both unthinkable and impossible! Still ...

Interestingly enough, each of his four older siblings had asked us, “Do you think Nick is gay? He just isn’t like the other boys.” None of them spoke to him of their “gut feelings.”

The second “truth” is that a week before his birthday, we went to the temple, fasting. We had decided the only answer that put all the pieces together *was* homosexuality! We left the temple with heavy hearts but *knowing*. We waited a week before talking to him, partly because he was so busy and partly because we began a crash course in “Homosexuality 101.” We were amazed! We thought we knew all there was to know, such as: Homosexuality is a sin. It is a choice brought about by a poor relationship

**My delight in being with Nick and his obvious delight with my companionship made it easy to spend time with him.**



and lack of bonding to father, and so on. ... Anyone who chose it could fast, pray, “unchoose” it, “get repaired,” repent, marry and live happily heterosexually ever after.

For his birthday, we three went out to dinner. When we returned home, I asked Nick if we could talk to him. First I asked for his forgiveness for our insensitivity, ignorance and bigotry about homosexuality over the years. Close as we were, it must have hurt. I told Nick that we knew and how we came to know. “We love you and will stand by you whatever the future holds. We want your happiness. Your orientation will not, does not affect our love.” We all wept — Nick, for relief, Renée and I, for his past, present and future pain and for our present pain.

I’m sorry to say, he felt it necessary to assure us he had always lived the standards of the church. He didn’t need to. He was one of the best, most loving people we knew. And three years later, he still is. He also told us that he had known he was “different”

before he started kindergarten. By late childhood or early teens he was able to articulate the difference but never mentioned it nor acted upon it.

What now? “Dilemma” is the word to describe the situation we found ourselves in. “Serious,” “unresolvable,” “heart-wrenching,” “faith-testing” are some of the adjectives that began to come to mind.


My own training, from church and society, had taught me that I should shun and condemn the homosexual and therefore, my son! *Sorry, can’t do it!* I was a typical, bigoted, homophobic Mormon male. As bishop and counselor to three bishops, I was “well trained” in leadership seminars about homosexuality. In addition, as any active LDS parent or a gay child can testify, there is a *constant* barrage from the pulpit and church classroom that twists a knife in the heart and, we were to discover, is generally based on prejudice and ignorance. Sadly, when something causes pain, frequently, one has a tendency to withdraw from that which inflicts the pain.

So began our odyssey. We had always accepted what our church leaders told us: Homosexuality is a choice and can be “unchosen.” We were utterly confused. Carol Lynn Pearson said it well, in writing of her marriage to a gay man, “... dogma collides with experience.” If indeed it was a choice, had he chosen it when he was four or five? Ridiculous? Yes, but both he and we had “known” since then! Had his knowing or our “knowing” made it so? Maybe counseling *was* the answer! It would be an answer to our prayers if “choice” *were* true. Yet, how could homosexuality be a choice? Such a decision would make all homosexuals fools because they would have to enjoy persecution, ridicule, scorn, ostracism and loneliness.

The wall crumbled to dust. In subsequent talks with Nick we learned many things: He didn’t want to be homosexual. He had tried not to be for most of his life. No amount of praying, serving, counseling, promising, covenanting, pretending, dating lovely girls, wanting to fall in love, wanting to marry and have children had made him straight.

The three of us went to conferences, to see a Social Service counselor, to talk to a General Authority and to talk to other parents. We also talked to many LDS gays and a few lesbians.

What we learned, simply stated: *He is*

 *Continued on next page.*

## Family Fellowship

Family Fellowship is a volunteer service organization, a diverse collection of Mormon families engaged in the cause of strengthening families with homosexual members. We share our witness that gay and lesbian Mormons can be great blessings in the lives of their families, and that families can be great blessings in the lives of their gay and lesbian members. We strive to become more understanding and appreciative of each other while staying out of society's debate over homosexuality. We seek to put behind us all attitudes which are anti-family, which threaten loving relationships, and which drive family members apart. All who can support these goals are welcome to contribute to this newsletter. However, the views expressed here belong only to the individuals who express them.



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same-sex oriented! He may choose to be sexually active; he may choose celibacy, but he did not choose his orientation.

We have since become aware of many LDS gays (those five or six on the Kinsey Scale) whose lives were ruined because they were driven to environments and experiences that diminished or destroyed their opportunities to grow and excel. Too many have been and are being crushed by "reparative therapy," self-esteem torn from them until they believe they are evil and worthless, that the world would be better without them and so, the *final step*. ... "Fast enough, pray enough, serve enough and you will change." Deadly words to a guilt-ridden, self-loathing, sensitive man or woman. (We have found our gay sons and daughters are more tender, more easily hurt than their heterosexual counterparts, and often, more spiritual.) Behavior can be modified. Addiction can be cured. Genetic factors are unalterable. We are what we are.

Where are all true homosexuals who have made the change? Please, I beg for evidence. I beg for truth. Everyone with whom I have talked who has "changed orientation" has changed only behavior and in most cases, for a short period. Where are the long-term, follow-up studies? The American Medical Association has announced that it can no longer recommend reparative therapy for the homosexual. It has proved to be ineffective and, worse, destructive. Now the AMA encourages therapists to help the gay person accept his orientation.

The greatest tragedy existing within the LDS homosexual issue isn't the thousands who are not becoming heterosexual — it is information from LDS therapists and church leaders that *change or orientation is both necessary and possible*. This has produced a climate that denies honest, scientific investigation, love and compassion. I do not believe the church has the truth or, at least, the *whole truth* in this matter. The LDS statement on

homosexuality for priesthood leaders is not a definitive statement, but leaders act as though there is no possibility for the genetic causation of homosexuality.

I truly believe that science is discovering and will prove, for the most part, that homosexuality is genetic and permanent.

My frustration has to do with the church's inaccessibility, intellectually and emotionally, and its reluctance to reason with those of us who are in distress.

I am waiting to have it proven to me that homosexuality is a choice. The evidence is falling more and more to the side of genetics, less and less to the idea or possibility of change. Why does this issue have to be a contest? Why can't we work together, with open minds, in search of the truth? It is unbelievable to me that a position becoming more and more indefensible continues to be perpetuated, particularly in light of the suffering of so many people.

Parents of homosexual children cannot reconcile this issue. Why do our leaders create an atmosphere that forces us, as parents, to choose between the church and our children?

It has been suggested by church leaders that to relegate homosexuality to genetics denies hope for the salvation of the gay individual. I suggest that *false* hope for changing orientation is far more damaging. Could it be that there is yet more to be learned about God's plan and purpose?

I have confidence in my child. I have confidence in myself as father and priesthood leader in my home. I believe him when he says he is of a different orientation and cannot change. I think if I asked him to be celibate, he would do it to please me. That would certainly make life easier for me and for the church — or would it? Maybe life would be easier for all of us if we started with the truth and then made adjustments based upon that truth. If he was born homosexual let him live the part God gave him and develop to the greatest potential possible. 🙏

## From the Mail Basket

Keith Frogley

After our December issue of the Reunion Newsletter, we received several replies to the articles. One of which was a note from a subscriber in Kentucky who was especially pleased with the Family Focus article.

Not only did Marolyn Frogley's message lift the spirit of the reader, but he writes, "When I finished reading this issue, I immediately called my parents to see if they had received it and they had. ... I will be going home in March for the first time since

I started this crusade to educate my parents on homosexuality. I am hoping this will be the opportunity I have been waiting for to break the silence.

"Thank you and Family Fellowship for the information and inspiration you have supplied. I enjoyed your words. You spoke exactly what I hope someday my parents will feel."

If you would like to share some thoughts or your feelings with us, please write to:

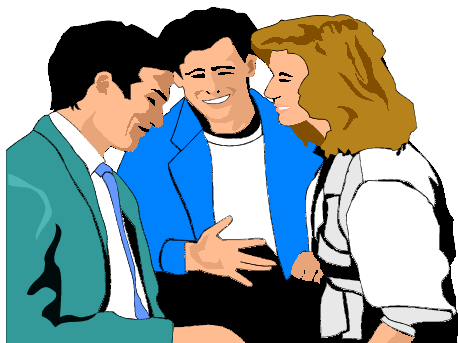
Family Fellowship  
Box 9451  
Salt Lake City, UT 84109 🙏

# Family Relationships

Jim Blair

I am an active member of the Church, having served as Bishop, high councilman, and in almost every other position in the ward. I believe that the Church contains the fullness of the gospel, and I support my local and general authorities to the fullest possible extent. I am also the father of a son who is gay. He is bright, caring, thoughtful, and full of Christian love.

My son talked with my wife and me about his being gay about 18 months ago. At that time he had been home from his mission for about two years. He had reached the point where he had to explain to us that his sexual orientation was something he had struggled with for most of his life, and that it had never changed through anything he was able to do. He felt that it was important for us to understand who he is



and that he could not live a double life any longer. He explained that he simply had not allowed himself to be honest with himself or with us for too long, and that it was important that he find out who he is and what he really believes.

We were not happy to learn that our son was gay, but we were not really surprised either. We had watched him from the time he was a little baby, and we had sensed from the time he was about three years of age that there was something different about him. We thought getting him involved in sports might help, so at a fairly young age we tried to involve him in hockey, soccer, and basketball. All these sports were of little or no interest to him, but he humored us and did what we asked. We made sure he had a good scouting experience. I became the scoutmaster and worked with my son and the other boys in the troop. He responded well, working to become an Eagle Scout, and earning three additional palms beyond the Eagle. But through all his years of scouting, he remained a little aloof from the other boys in the troop.

Our son decided he wanted to serve a mission, and he worked for a year to earn

the money to get himself out on the mission, and to pay for more of the mission as well. He was always very cooperative, thoughtful, and a good example of a person who lived the way he believed. It would not be possible to find a son who was any better than he was. He served an honorable mission, and upon his return involved himself heavily in the Institute program at the University.

I honestly believe that my son tried in every way to be 'straight'. But the fact is that he is gay, not by his own choice, but by the genetic factors that determined his particular characteristics. I do not believe that he chose to be homosexual any more than I chose to be heterosexual. As a member of the Church, I expect him to be virtuous, to select one companion with whom he can establish a long-term relationship, and to continue to live the kind of life he has always lived.

I have a strong testimony of the Gospel and I have a strong testimony concerning the truthfulness of the Church and its divine destiny. I have no intention of leaving the Church or seeking retribution against the brethren because of the Church's stand on homosexuality. But, I will not forsake my son and ask him to be different from what he is. I love him and will continue to support him in any way that I can. That doesn't mean that I will necessarily approve of all that he does, it simply means that I will accept him for who he is.

I do not pretend to understand all that the Lord has in mind for His homosexual children, but I do know that He will not love them less than He does His heterosexual children. In all that I read of the Savior's life, He loved all men and tried His very hardest to help all who asked. I am grateful for His love and acceptance of me, even when I do that which is not right. I also know that He loves my son, and wants him to find his way through this life with joy. This knowledge is part of the reason I affiliate with Family Fellowship. The goals of Family Fellowship are to provide a warm and accepting place, to provide a good, wholesome environment for them. 🙏

Benjimen Blair

I have been very fortunate in my relationship with my father. I could not have chosen a better father to come down to earth to. He has always been a quiet, steady influence on me since my youth. He has always supported me in my doings, flamboyant as I may be. So I realize how lucky I am to have him.

Since I was young, Dad has been active in my life. He coached me through

scouting, from Bobcat to Eagle. He played the roles of cub master, scout master and advisor. I was a rather quiet and withdrawn child, but he was always there to support me in any situation. He has also been a spiritual guide. Dad is one of those people who is ready to lend a hand when needed, and even when it's not needed.

I have always been active in the church, becoming involved in whatever calling I was given. I came to terms with my sexuality while I was on my mission, deciding that the church, as it is right now, holds limited opportunities for me. At that time, I also made the decision that, even though I loved the church, I would eventually have to leave it. For a year after my mission, I continued active in the church. I was in LDSSA and Institute, and served as ward clerk and ward music director. I met a good friend at the place I worked at the time, and he had a lot of gay friends in Salt Lake. We would spend time together on weekends and holidays.

My life was a constant irony. I would be going to a church that didn't condone who I am, then I would be going to other places, the complete opposite of my church beliefs, to find real acceptance. That caught up with me after two years, and I dropped out of the church. I quit my job also, and school was going down the tubes.

I came out to my parents in September of 1992. The day was very stressful. I slept most of the day and was a wreck. My parents had arranged a meeting because they were concerned about my being withdrawn and secluded. They must have suspected something. The meeting lasted for four hours, and I remember breaking down because I was so ashamed of myself, not for myself as a person, but for what my beliefs had become, and because they were so different than what the church taught.

I was amazed to find that my parents accepted me for who I was. My mom's first comment to me was "I know it's not a choice." I really can't imagine what I would have done if they had not accepted things. They are still having a hard time dealing with everything, but they are attending a support group and educating themselves through lectures and reading. Dad, being Bishop at the time of my coming out, wanted my name to remain on the records. Since I wasn't active at the time, he felt there was no reason to take any action. He was at the end of his term as Bishop and rather glad of it, I believe. It was a hard job.

Dad is still there for me and has continued to be a support. Mom and Dad have been helping out in Family Fellowship. I have moved to Salt Lake to give us all some space to grow and deal with things. Coming out to my parents was one of the best steps I have ever taken. I just wish everyone's parents were as accepting as mine. Truly, I have been blessed. 🙏

# Family Service

The entries below list some ways that families and family members are reaching out to each other, sharing their experiences, and holding their families together. This space is provided for anyone to report on and advertise activities that share the goal of strengthening Mormon families dealing with this issue, regardless of what organization the activity may be sponsored by.

## Utah County Forum Fireside January 8, 1995

— Gary & Mildred Watts, Provo

The forum was held on Sunday, January 8th at the Utah Valley Regional Medical Center in the Clark Auditorium.

A video, titled The Jim Butcher Story from the TV program 20/20 was shown. It was a personal story about a gay man and the process he uses to tell his family not only that he is gay but that he has AIDS. Jim's love for his family and his family's love for him is very warm and touching. Marybeth Raynes, L.C.S.W., presented a stimulating and informative discussion of "The closet. How did we get here and how do we get out?" We had approximately 150 wonderful people in attendance. Our next forum in Utah County will be held on July 9.

## Family Fellowship Social January 23 and March 13, 1995

Five couples in the Idaho Falls area met in January for dinner and discussion at the home of Wayne and Arlene Cooper. Plans are in place to meet again in early March for a similar but larger group of parents. Parents are finding it a great comfort and source of support to find others who share their experience and concerns and their joys in their gay sons and lesbian daughters. One of the interesting items of discussion concerned the chance meeting of three of the involved families at the temple soon after the anniversary of the death of Jeanine and Deloy Nelson's son, Doug. The Nelson's felt great comfort from the other families who remembered and provided support. Doug died of AIDS and his Memorial Service is contained in a Family Fellowship booklet.

## Legacy Foundation's Reconciliation

— Janie Bennett, Orem  
— Tyler Yates, Lehi

The Utah County Reconciliation program has been meeting every Thursday night with approximately fifteen to twenty people attending. Our topics have ranged from Personal Responsibility and Personal Revelation to God's Love and Morality. We have had several new people attending the group and welcome all who would like to come see what the group is about.

The focus of this group is to heal spiritual wounds in order to develop greater love among ourselves, our families and our religious communities. Recently we joined efforts with other Reconciliation groups throughout the area to be of greater service to gays, lesbians and their families.

## Stonewall Center Presentation April 2, 1995

— Ron & Adonna Schow, Pocatello

Strengthening families with homosexual members will be the focus of a special presentation by Family Fellowship Board members. The Wasatch Affirmation Chapter has offered an invitation to Family Fellowship to explain our purpose at their semiannual conference fireside at the Stonewall Center at 5:00 P.M. Adonna Schow will also present her keynote address, "The Truth about Being Persons: Sonny Discovers Himself, Sex and Love," which she shared at last September's Las Vegas National Conference.

## The Second Biennial Intermountain Conference on Sexuality April 29, 1995

— Gary & Mildred Watts, Provo

Gary, two of our children and myself attended the sexuality conference held at the University of Utah in April of 1993. The timing of the conference could not have been better. Our son had just recently been excommunicated from the Church. We had so many questions. Each one of us were on different levels as far as our information on homosexuality and our own personal feelings.

For more information about  
Family Fellowship write to:  
P.O. Box 9451  
Salt Lake City, UT 84109  
Phone: (801) 272-3806

The conference met the needs of all of us.

We attended some sessions together and separated to attend others individually. We shared the information we had each gained over lunch and then again over dinner. It was a positive, productive experience for all of us. Beyond gaining much needed perspective and information, we became acquainted with wonderful people who were struggling with the same questions and feelings that we were. We made friendships at the conference that over the last two years have grown and developed into meaningful, loving, caring relationships.

It was a bonding and educational experience for our family. We are hoping that more of our family — including those that live out of state — can be in attendance this year.

## The Family Fellowship Newsletter

Please encourage all those who might benefit from receiving the Reunion newsletter to order their copy right away. We are offering a one year subscription for only \$10. All newsletters will be mailed in plain, unmarked envelopes. This quarterly newsletter, booklets, audiotapes and other materials are available by contacting us at the address mentioned above. Additional donations are greatly appreciated too.

## A Parent's Prayer

When I take time to stop and ponder,  
To catch some thoughts  
That just might stray,  
I count among my many blessings  
My two sweet spirits who are gay.  
The worth of souls is great tis said,

*"But disregard the few,  
Who if they really wanted,  
Could change and be like me and you."*

I will not judge nor be the jury,  
I'll let him who reigns on high  
Decide the fate of all he sent here  
Although we know not why.  
I share their hurt, their pain, their heartache  
Praying for the world to know  
We all are God's most precious children  
Compassion is our goal.

Claire F. Malmstrom  
February 1, 1995

