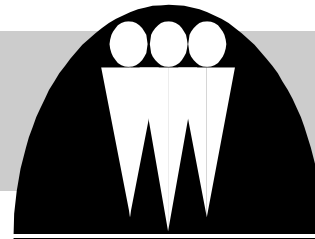


Reunion

Winter 1997

The Family Fellowship Newsletter



Issue 11

My Tribute to Mary

Gary Watts

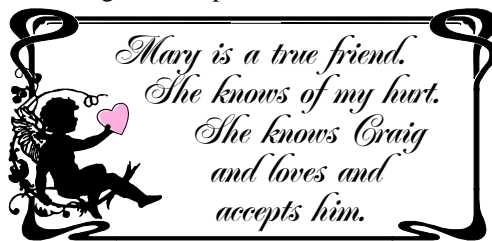
The day had begun with a blend of tears and anger. My wife had had an emotional Saturday and the heavy feeling persisted into the next day. Our friend and neighbor, Sharon, had called and asked her to help her with the Relief Society lesson on this Sunday and Mildred had declined saying that it would just be too painful. Sharon said she understood and had told Mildred that she loved her.

Later that day our married daughter, Nancy, had suggested to Mildred that she wished she would have accepted and that we could be more active in the ward. "You can probably do a lot more good by staying active and speaking up when the opportunity presents itself than by simply staying away."

Upon awakening this morning, the subject had again been broached and we had had a lively discussion about the merits of participation in a church that no longer seemed to meet our needs as individuals and as a family. "Do ward members think it should just be 'business as usual'?" I asked referring to our daughter's suggestion that she wished we could be more active. "If all the families who had been hurt by this issue simply stayed away wouldn't the church be more likely to get the message than if we all keep going and participating as if everything is hunky-dory? It seems to me that continuing to go and acting as if everything is okay is akin to being in the closet. We need to let our friends and neighbors know that we are hurting and feel our son and

family have been abused by the very people we should be able to count on for support. I just don't understand how anyone who has been through what we have been could want to participate or serve in the church. Some have even served missions. I guess they are much better Christians than I am."

"But Gary," my wife replied, "the people in our ward have no idea why I can't participate. They think I am being a 'poor sport'. They can't begin to comprehend the hurt I feel and



how difficult it is for me to try to participate in a lesson. I guess it's like a death. I'm still grieving and I wonder if I can ever recover. The church was the most important thing in my life and when they excommunicated my son it was like my own mother or father turning on me."

"All we can do is what we can do" I said. "I'm going to continue to participate in the Family Fellowship and be as pro-active in gay and lesbian issues as I can and let the 'chips fall where they may.'"

Following that brief and emotional interchange I decided to do my morning jog. I love to jog. It gives me an opportunity to think and I was thinking hard during this particular jog. I was thinking about our son and how

much I loved him. I was thinking about what a great person he is and how he had been so misjudged, and how our church and society had actually abused him. I was feeling contempt for those in the LDS Social Services program who continue to label this extraordinary human being as somehow damaged, as somehow out of touch with his creator, as somehow not worthy of inclusion in Christ's church. Who are those people? Why do they continue to hurt and demean these valuable human beings? How can our church leaders continue to be so insensitive? All this hurt and destructive behavior because some are convinced that God has said that people with same-sex orientation can't love one another physically.

Three-fourths of the way through my jog, my neighbor and friend Mary slowed her car on her way to church, rolled down the window and said jokingly, "Do you want a ride?"

"No thanks, I need this more than you know!"

"How's Craig? You're thinking about him aren't you?"

"Yeah, I am. He is doing well."

"Well, have a great day!"

"Thanks, Mary."

As she pulled away, tears came to my eyes. Mary is a true friend. She knows of my hurt. She knows Craig and loves and accepts him even though he is homosexual. She considers him to be a valuable and great person and refuses to judge or disenfranchise him. I honestly don't know how Mary feels about homosexual love but I know it doesn't affect how she feels about Craig. Mary is important to me. She is relevant. She is a true Christian. It's too bad she isn't a General Authority. If the church could only treat my son as Mary does, it would still be important and relevant to me and our family. Why can't the church do that? 🙏

Reflections of an Openly Gay Public School Teacher

Camille Lee

If someone would have told me nine years ago when I began my teaching career that I would "come out" as a lesbian teacher, I would have said that they were absolutely crazy. But over time, life changes for us all. And it has certainly changed for me during the past year.

My first teaching assignment was at Butler Middle School in the Jordan School District. I was teaching science and physical education. I was young, inexperienced, and a lesbian. For the six years that I stayed at Butler, I lived in

fear. I stayed isolated and did not get involved in the school community.

The rumors started soon after my arrival. I was constantly the recipient of homophobic slurs as I walked down the hallway. Parents pulled students out of my classes, and my principal told me to "change my reputation." I lied about my life and didn't feel very good about myself. Although I did have a few close friends at this school who were very supportive of me, most of my experience there was quite painful.

I never did change my "reputation" as a lesbian at Butler Middle School, but I did establish a reputation as a good teacher. This

enabled me to get a job at East High School three years ago.

I spent my first year at East trying to accomplish two goals. The first was to be a good teacher, and the second was to keep my sexual orientation in the closet. I was successful at both. I received outstanding evaluations, and I never heard the "L" word once during that year. I also stayed extremely isolated and didn't form any associations with other faculty, administrators, students, or parents.

Although I had accomplished my two goals, I still didn't feel very effective. I wanted to be

🙏 *Continued on the 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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out as a lesbian teacher. I wanted students to realize that they knew gay and lesbian people. I just didn't know how to go about doing this, and I was afraid.

Then the East High Gay Straight Alliance story began and that gave me a way to begin the coming out process. I feel very lucky to have been in the right place at the right time when three students from East High asked me to be the faculty sponsor of a club they were wanting to form. I won't write in detail about the past year and my involvement, but I will try to explain some of the changes I went through.

I knew that if I was going to help these courageous students that I would have to rally support from faculty, administrators, and parents. Through being honest and open with these people, I have formed close associations with them. My fear greatly decreased as I was supported and respected by many teachers at East. Kay Peterson, my principal, has been behind me every step of the way. Without his support, I could not have come out. I am grateful to all of my wonderful colleagues at East for their encouragement.

During the past year, Doug Wortham and I formed GLSTN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Teachers Network) chapter in Utah. Through my involvement in this organization, I became empowered to take the step of coming out of the closet. Last April four of our chapter members were honored with a Pathfinder Award from GLSTN National. I was sent a copy of the press release that would be going out to the local newspapers. I panicked when I saw my name and the word lesbian on the same line, since my principal had asked me to stay out of the media. When I requested that this information not be included in the press release, I was told that doing so would defeat the purpose of what this award was about. I was embarrassed and humiliated and knew it was time to stand up. I realized at that moment that I would not hide anymore.

When the *Private Eye* wanted to do a cover story on our GLSTN chapter last month, I knew it was time to speak out in this article and told my story. That same day we had our first ever GLSTN booth at the UEA (Utah Education Association) conference. Many media reporters visited us, and I spoke about being a

lesbian teacher with them. What an exciting day! One that I had been waiting for for a very long time.

Since then, my coming out has been a non-issue at East High School. I have not heard one student mention it. Kay Petersen received two phone calls and they were both positive. Many of my colleagues have given me their congratulations. I haven't experienced one negative comment or situation. I realize now that I spent a lot of years living in unnecessary fear. But that was a journey that I had to go through.

My life is different now. I no longer live in fear every day. I'm not afraid of losing my job. I'm not afraid of students rejecting me. I'm not afraid of being the recipient of homophobic remarks. I'm not afraid of my work environment changing. I'm not afraid of being who I am anymore. I have become free. Free to be a role model for students. Free to have a rainbow sticker on my car. Free to talk with colleagues about what I did over the weekend. Free to answer students' questions honestly. Free to stop homophobic remarks. Free to have a picture of my girlfriend on my desk. Free to do all of this without fear.

I can now concentrate fully on being a good teacher and doing the job I am supposed to do, instead of spending so much time worrying about what will I do if...

I know that all gay and lesbian teachers are not in a situation to be able to come out. But for me, it was time. I could no longer sit in silence as my gay and lesbian students were speaking out. I had to stand up. I had to educate people about who I am. After all, that is what I do best. Clayton Vetter, my hero from Skyline High School, and the first public teacher in Utah to come out, gave me a quote that best explains why I have chosen to speak out.

"You might be 38 as I was when I heard a voice call my name, to take a stand. You will worry that you will lose your job, that they will bomb your house or beat you. You will worry that you are not strong enough, your voice is not significant enough, your abilities not strong enough and you may do nothing. You may go on to live to be 90 years old, but you will be just as dead at 38 because it will have been the death of your spirit." —Martin Luther King, Jr. 🙏



A Son's Story



David Malmstrom

I have lived in Utah all of my life. I consider it to be one of my greatest blessings that I was born into an LDS family, with three older sisters, and two wonderful parents. I have been active in the Church all of my life, and have been raised with the Church playing an important role in every aspect of my life. I have

had countless positive experiences through my involvement in the Church, and I will always cherish the memories, experiences, beliefs, and moral standards that I have obtained from it.

I wish I could say that is the end of the story. However, when I became a young man and became increasingly aware of my sexuality, I realized that I was sexually attracted to members of my own sex. I not only found this to be in conflict with my own beliefs and the beliefs of my family, but also to be in conflict

with the Church and the rest of society in general. During my teenage years I assumed that these feelings were part of a phase that I was going through and that they would soon pass. I tried desperately to suppress my sexual feelings but they did not go away. On the contrary, they became stronger and stronger. I began to assume that these feelings must be a punishment to me for having done something wrong, though I felt I was leading a life in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel, and could not understand why the Lord would punish me with such a trial.

I went out of my way to fill my life with wholesome activities and righteous thoughts, hoping that these feelings would go away. But they persisted through high school, where I was an above average student, active in Seminary and other functions of the school. After high school I hoped that the Lord would bless me with normal sexual feelings after serving a successful mission. I received my mission call to the Georgia Atlanta Mission, where I spent the next two years leading the life of a typical Mormon Missionary. I consider my mission to have been successful and wouldn't trade it for anything. I gained a close personal friendship with my mission president and served in the mission office with him. My mission was a positive experience which has added much to my life.

To my dismay, however, I found upon my arrival home that my homosexual feelings persisted. I didn't tell anyone about these feelings, including any church authorities such as my bishop or stake president. I diligently prayed during the next few years for help from the Lord, still hoping that my sexual feelings would change. I was the best man at the wedding of my closest friend, Richard. Realizing that all of my closest friends were getting married, I became concerned and then desperate for an answer as to why I was attracted sexually only to other men. I had some close female friends, and had a few opportunities to get married, but knowing that my homosexual feelings had persisted for so long, I was hesitant to get married with only the hope that my sexual orientation would change. After all, I had led my life thus far in accordance with the Gospel and my sexual orientation had remained unchanged.

I was convinced that my sexual orientation was a punishment from God for something that I had done wrong, though I did not know what it was. By now I was becoming very depressed, and began to search the scriptures and books by the General Authorities to see if I could find answers to my questions about homosexuality. I read a book by President Spencer W. Kimball titled, "The Miracle of Forgiveness." He seemed to insinuate that homosexuality was brought upon a person through lesser sins, that "snowballed" into what he called "a crime against nature ... an ugly sin, repugnant to those who find no temptation in it ..." He continued that homosexuality is "curable, and forgivable." This cure that I was reading about piqued my interest, and I diligently searched the rest of his book for this cure. Unfortunately, the advice that I found was what I had already been doing most of my life, but I vowed to



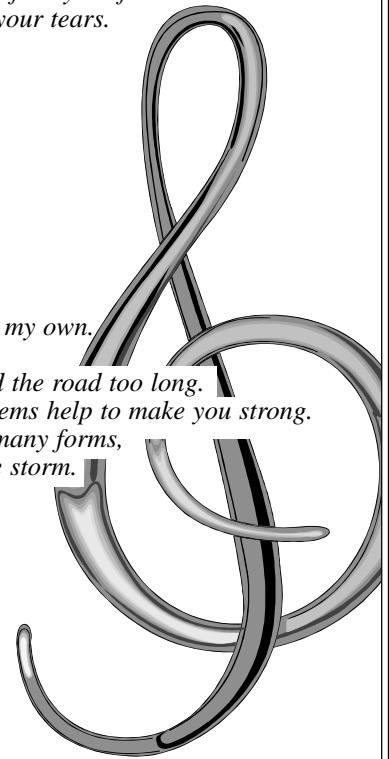
When I was writing for our second album, I was blessed to be part of the creation of this wonderful piece of music. It expresses a view that possibly our Father in Heaven has of the struggle that we face on earth, and how he is with us in every moment, supporting, loving and accepting us as we are.

*As I watch you struggle, just to make it through the day,
I hear you cry, and plead for help, because you feel you've lost your way.
You think that I have left you all alone to face your fears.
It seems that there's no one around to wipe away your tears.
My child there's a place you must begin,
Simply open up your heart — and let me in.*

*I pray thee...
Make your problems serve you,
Become a master of your fate.
Reach for the strength you'll find within you,
And always know it's never too late.
I hear your words, I know your thoughts,
Don't feel you're all alone...
We'll walk each road together — because you are my own.*

*There are times, your burden seems too heavy and the road too long.
You must endure, have faith and know, your problems help to make you strong.
Search amid your trials, great blessings come in many forms,
Then stop, look around, and find the beauty in the storm.
With your strength together we can overcome,
Simply place your trust in me, we'll be as one...*

*I pray thee...
Make your problems serve you,
Become a master of your fate.
Reach for the strength you'll find within you,
And always know it's never too late.
I hear your words, I know your thoughts,
Don't feel you're all alone...
We'll walk each road together — because you are my own.*



continue to put evil thoughts out of my mind, and replace them with good, wholesome thoughts. I vowed to continue dating good, wholesome young women who were members of the Church. I vowed to obey the commandments, and to live my life in accordance with the Gospel. But I was already doing all of this, and so I was even more confused as to why I was plagued with these feelings. I wanted desperately to repent, but I did not know what I needed to repent of. I shed many tears on my bed as I knelt in prayer to the Lord in a desperate search for answers.

Finally I decided that I was not worthy of life, and after many hours of prayer, and searching President Kimball's book, I concluded that I must end my life. On May 1, 1985, I took an overdose of several different types of sleeping pills in an attempt to do just that. Fortunately, this attempt was unsuccessful, but for five days I was

unconscious in intensive care. As I recovered during the next month, I received counseling from psychologists who diagnosed my condition as depression, put me on anti-depressant medication, and suggested further counseling. Through that counseling, my homosexuality was made known. For the first time in my life I admitted it to another person, my counselor, and with her help I was able to feel better about myself, and admit to my family why I tried to commit suicide. Fortunately, they were very supportive and understanding and did not condemn me in any way.

My activity in the Church has decreased, and although I have not resolved all of the conflicts, I continue to have very strong feelings and beliefs toward the Gospel, and have a very strong testimony of it. Somehow through all of this, I also believe in myself, and have accepted my homosexuality as a part of myself as a worthy child of God. 🙏

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 Firesides January 12 and April 13, 1997

— Mildred and Gary Watts, Provo

The quarterly Utah County Forum was held on January 12. Despite a huge Utah snowstorm along the Wasatch front, a group of over 125 people were in attendance.

A compelling musical program, chronicling his life story as a gay Mormon, was presented by Lee Olsen, recording artist in the Christian/LDS market. Following the program, we enjoyed a light buffet and visiting.

The next Utah County Family Fellowship Forum will be held April 13, at 5:00 P.M. at the Utah Regional Medical Center in the Clark Auditorium in Provo. There will be a panel discussion on homosexuality and the family followed by a light buffet.

GLSTN National Convention March 21-23, 1997

— Linda Chamberlain, Salt Lake City

WHAT: GLSTN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Teachers (1st ever) National Convention

WHERE: Downtown Holiday Inn, about 800 South., SLC

WHEN: March 21-23, Friday-Sunday.

WHAT'S HAPPENING: A weekend of strategizing, planning and fun for everyone who wants to see our schools become places where all people are respected. Featured speaker, Urvashi Vaid, author of *Virtual Equality*, comic Suzanne Westenhoefer and over 40 workshops.

OUR NEED: We would like to be able to provide housing for our out-of-town visitors. We will need to know the following; 1) do you have pets, 2) will you take smokers 3) how many people or couples would you be able to accommodate 4) would you be able to provide transportation or do you live on a bus line. The maximum stay would probably be 3 nights. GLSTN would like to charge each guest a \$10/night fee as a fund raiser to send one of our teachers to a training seminar this summer. This fee is, of course, optional.

Please address any questions regarding housing or the convention to:

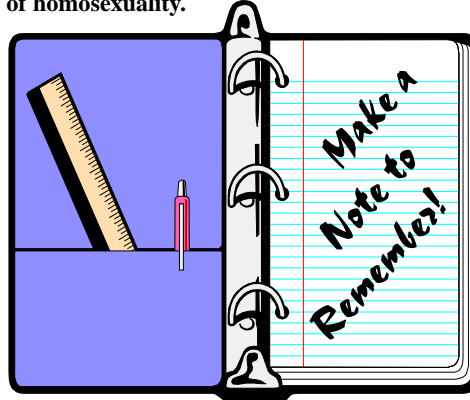
Linda Chamberlain
E-mail: will@burgoyne.com
1754 E. Ft. Douglas Circle, SLC 84103
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Intermountain Conference on Homosexuality: "Bringing Families Together" May 2-4, 1997

— Mildred and Gary Watts, Provo

The Intermountain Conference on Homosexuality: "Bringing Families Together" will be held May 2-4 at the University of Utah

and the Red Lion Inn. Co-sponsored by Family Fellowship, the University of Utah Graduate School of Social Work, and PFLAG (Parents, Friends and Families of Gays and Lesbians), the conference will begin with a plenary session on Friday evening in the Fine Arts Auditorium and continue all day Saturday on the University of Utah campus with 15 different workshops dealing with family, social, biologic, and political aspects of homosexuality.



The conference is open to the general public and will provide 8 hours of continuing education credit for Psychologists, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists.

The general conference will conclude at 6:30 P.M. Saturday evening, but will be followed Saturday evening and Sunday morning with programs and workshops for parents of gays and lesbians at the Red Lion Hotel. A block of rooms have been reserved at the Red Lion Hotel (\$110/night) and the Shilo Inn (\$80/night — immediately across the street from the Red Lion) for registrants coming from outside the city. Registrants should make their own hotel reservations. Advance registration fees (deadline April 21st) are as follows:

Professionals desiring continuing education credit: \$55.00 (Plenary session workshops, box lunch) Non-professional, no

For more information about Family Fellowship write to:
P.O. Box 9451
Salt Lake City, UT 84109
Phone: (801) 374-1447

certification: \$30.00 (Plenary session, workshops, box lunch).

Family rate (limited to immediate family): \$40.00 (Plenary session, workshops-box lunches not included, but may be ordered in advance for \$5.00 each).

Parent rate for Friday evening buffet prior to plenary session, plenary session, Saturday workshops, box lunch, Saturday evening dinner at Red Lion, Personal stories session, Sunday workshops, Sunday morning brunch, open mike session: \$65.00/person.

Same-day registration fees will increase by approximately 20%.

For more information contact Gerry Johnston (801) 568-1141 or Millie Watts (801) 374-1447.

Provo Reconciliation Sundays

— Tyler Yates, Lehi

The Reconciliation group in Provo has found a new home! We are fortunate enough to meet once again in the home of Randy Weight, Provo Reconciliation's original founder. Meetings are held weekly every Sunday at 6:00 P.M.

The focus of the Provo Reconciliation group is to heal spiritual wounds in order to develop greater love among ourselves, our families and our religious community. We strive to build bridges between our spirituality and our sexuality by fostering respect for our capacity to love and for our spiritual background. Through a series of guided discussions that address common questions and concerns, participants have a resource in resolving their own dilemmas, and at the same time can join in fellowship with others who also seek reconciliation. Drawing inspiration from LDS scriptures, Church history, and personal experience, this program can help gay Mormons regain a sense of spiritual worth and connection with God.

For more information, please contact the Provo Reconciliation at 373-0515.

Newsletter Contributions

People frequently ask how they might submit articles for the Reunion newsletter. As mentioned in each issue, all who can support the goal of strengthening families with homosexual members are welcome to contribute, regardless of their personal views. The best articles are those that discuss relationships between family members in their efforts to achieve understanding and mutual appreciation. Parents frequently write one combined article which may be featured on the front page. Two articles from the same family, such as one from a parent and one from a child, are especially motivating and often appear on the third page. Many articles are simply written from one family member's point of view. Articles usually range from 600 to 1200 words in length. Activity reports for the fourth page are generally smaller. Short poetry or inspiring quotations are also welcome. As in any publication, articles may be edited for length, grammar, and content. However, every attempt is made to preserve the originality of each article, and non-trivial changes are submitted to the original author for approval. Short items may be submitted on paper, but articles should be submitted on disk or through e-mail. Please send all items to Claire Malmstrom at 962 North 1040 East, Lehi UT 84043 (Phone: 768-9112) or to Tyler Yates at 497 East 300 South, Lehi UT 84043 (Phone: 768-1836) or by e-mail: TyYates@Novell.com.