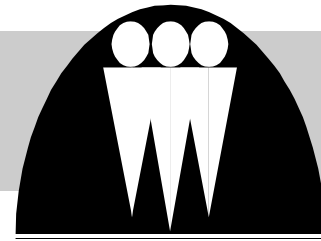


# Reunion

Spring 1997

The Family Fellowship Newsletter



Issue 12

## Family Focus

Melissa Johnson

Sundays are called the day of rest. But in my life Sunday has more often been a day of miracles. One particular instance has left me with the unmistakable assurance that our Heavenly Father is truly there beside us, strengthening our family and blessing us with opportunities to show unconditional love.

Our youngest daughter, Diane had come home for the summer. She had been attending school at Ricks College after serving a successful mission in South America. Diane had always been a faithful church member and an example to her friends and neighbors. In our neighborhood she was best known for the stories she could tell and the smiles she could bring to the faces of children and adults alike. Diane gathered awards and won countless competitions in speech and drama. But more importantly, she loved to share her stories at family gatherings or at parties for friends or neighbors. When she taught Primary, her class loved to sit in a circle, long after the time to go, and beg to hear another story. It was her gift, I think, one that helped her cope through many years of isolation and pain, and ironically, one that kept much of her inner beauty hidden from everyone, including her family.

There was one story that Diane couldn't tell, not for many years. It was a true story. One about a frightened girl with feelings that she couldn't understand and for much of her life, couldn't accept. It was a story about shame and wanting to shrink from the rest of the world because she was a lesbian. But rather than tell this story, Diane escaped into the make-believe lands where everything would always have a happy ending.

The need to be loved and validated was always a central theme in her tales. She communicated it well. But that's essentially where the communication ended. And during the years following high school, including her mission and college years, Diane seemed to communicate less and less.

I remember how sad I felt at the time, not knowing why she was retreating into her own world, not knowing why she reduced every conversation into mere trivialities. We had been so close. We used to talk about everything including efficient ways to dispose of the Utah County Journal.

In looking back now, it all made sense. The struggles with depression, all the emotional highs and lows, and the ultimate silence. Diane used to leave an audience crying with laughter, then quietly shut herself in her room to do a

different type of crying. I've listened to her sob with an almost silent manner so that no one would know. And when I would ask what the matter was, she would simply breathe in and place a practiced smile on her face just like it was a Band-Aid. And she would say, "Oh mom, it's nothing..." I asked her once if she was having boy-problems and without looking at me she whispered, "I guess that's what it is." Only it wasn't what I had imagined.

Before she left for college Diane had been dating Nathan, a fellow who lived in our ward who was now the son of our current Bishop. Their relationship was on and off for a few years but Nathan seemed to have a great deal of patience and I'm sure he loved her. He continued to try to work something out with Diane even after several displays of disinterest on her part.

When Nathan learned that Diane was coming back for the summer, he was knocking on our door the day she returned. That weekend they had a date and when Diane returned I could tell that something was terribly wrong.

"How was your date?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

Diane walked past me, head down, as if she didn't even hear me. Then suddenly she turned and the tears started flowing. My little girl seemed to crumble right in front of me and all



**Diane kept much of her inner beauty hidden from everyone, including her family.**

I could do was hold her. We sat on the floor and she wept. It must have taken every ounce of effort for Diane to finally start talking. With a heartbroken laugh she said she had a story to tell me. And she wanted me to just hear it all until the end without saying anything. And so I listened. It was a story I never expected to hear. This one was real. This one was filled with raw emotion and told with real pain. I tried not to let my own judgments cloud my capacity to love and just listen as Diane explained her struggles to accept herself as a lesbian. She had tried to explain the situation to Nathan but he turned a deaf ear before she could say the words. And in a way, I guess she was finding a sense of closure by telling me. It must have helped because she seemed to be comforted in explaining it all. She asked me not to tell Wayne, her father, because she was

afraid he would react like Nathan had and become cold and silent. I promised to say nothing.

After seeing Diane to her room I stepped outside and went for a long walk and there, did my own crying. I had never before had to face even the possibility that one of my children might be gay. Even after Diane's explanation, I was still so unsure as to what it all meant. But I was sure of one thing, that regardless of how much time it took to understand my daughter, it should take no time at all to show her that I still loved her. That was certain.

That Sunday, the day I witnessed a miracle, will be forever etched in my soul. I invited Diane to attend church with her father and me. Many of the young men and women who Diane had taught, knew that she was home and were so hoping that she would be at church so they could say hello. A lot of people would be happy to see her and I felt like she would be comforted by their fellowship. She seemed reluctant, but agreed. She was concerned that Nathan would be there and seeing him would be awkward. Unfortunately her concerns were more than realized.

After the meetings, Wayne, Diane and I were standing near the front entrance. Wayne had to stay for another meeting with the Stake President and was just waiting for him to show. Suddenly Diane started to stiffen up and the color faded from her face. Instantly I realized why. Some young men were approaching us from one of the connecting halls just around the corner. They were speaking in Spanish and I could tell that Diane was becoming more uneasy. I couldn't understand Spanish, but she could and worse than that, one of the voices was Nathan's. And then I heard it, a single word, spoken from his mouth, in English and punctuated with prejudice. The word "Dyke" echoed in my ears as laughter followed. I thought I also heard Diane's name spoken, but it could've been my own voice suddenly reacting as I watched Diane bolt from the church. It was almost like she had been slapped from where she was standing and thrown outside by the force. She was reeling as she raced for the car. Wayne turned with lightning-speed, at the same time handing off his books to me and hurrying outside.

The books never made it into my hands. They just tumbled to the floor. I scrambled to pick them up and join my husband and daughter but papers were all scattered. Soon, Nathan and his friends turned the corner, surprised at what had just happened. Nathan's face was red, our eyes connected and communicated volumes.

"I'm so sorry," he said.

I fought back a burst of anger. "Diane needs to know that."

Nathan motioned to venture outside but I

*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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stopped him. "It might be best if you waited a bit," I said. As I looked through the doors I could see Wayne and Diane sitting together in the car. Nathan nodded and with great embarrassment, walked away; his friends followed.

I meant to join my family right then, but I believe the spirit kept me still. Instead of leaving the church, I stood inside and watched a miracle unfold, through tear-filled eyes.

Wayne had his arm around Diane. He was listening to her. Between sobs, she was telling him something and I knew that she was telling him the same story she told me. It was like watching a silent movie. I was already familiar with the plot. They hugged and held each other for a long time. It seemed like eternities. Warm

and wonderful eternities.

Wayne missed his meeting with the Stake President that day. But that day was a turning point for our family. After years of seeing our daughter withdraw, that day we came closer together than we had ever been. Wayne had witnessed the harsh effects of careless and even mean-spirited words. He also saw how honesty and compassion could soften his own heart.

Neither Wayne nor I have formed a satisfactory opinion concerning homosexuality at this point. We still struggle to simply talk about it. But with Diane's help, we are able to let the story unfold and tackle one chapter at a time. We're not sure how this story will end, but the spirit seems to tell me that somehow the ending will be a happy one. 🙏

## The Bookshelf

Review by James F. Cartwright

### *The Family Heart: A Memoir of When Our Son Came Out.*

by Dew, Robb Forman.

Reading, Massachusetts:

Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1994©.

Have you ever felt you were alone in having a gay child? Have you ever said something to your gay child you wished you could unsay? Have you ever remained silent when someone spoke unkindly of gays or lesbians and then felt you had failed your child and yourself? You will gain insight through reading this book.

Robb Forman Dew is a novelist whose husband, Charles, chairs the history department at Williams College in northwestern Massachusetts. They have two sons, Stephen and Jack, the older of whom came out to them in the spring of 1991 at the end of his sophomore year at Yale. The family journey, and more particularly, her journey, documented in these pages, provides insight in several areas. I focus on three: grieving, friends, and balance.

Concerning grieving, Robb talks about the year her second and last child left for boarding school at age fourteen. She remained stoical, giving out the proper answers to his frightened question, "What have I done to myself" even though the question echoed her own. Moreover, though she had opportunity to express her grief while alone in the family home for two days, she did not. In the first week of October that year, they received a surprise — an early, heavy, wet snowstorm. The trees were still in full leaf. Robb and Charles went, as did their neighbors, into the yards to try to relieve the trees of their heavy burden. In the distance they heard a report as of rifle fire and then more reports growing closer.

"We couldn't imagine what we were hearing until the leafy, snow-burdened head of one of the three tall maples by the road in front of our house suddenly seemed to make a half turn upon its trunk and, with a loud creaking and then a sudden, resonant crack, tumbled slowly into the road.... And then the tree next to it crashed slowly down, and in a

few minutes there was chaos as the trees everywhere around us broke midway down their trunks....

"For months after that freakish early snowstorm I was taken aback whenever I caught sight of the torn and broken trees, their trunks split, raw, and bright orange-brown in the dark forests of the Berkshires, and I, too, would find myself moved to tears. Twice, when I was driving and caught sight of a broad, scarred, forested vista, I had to pull over and stop the car because I was caught by surprise in a paroxysm of sobbing." (pp.58-60.)

While this experience occurred years before Stephen came out, it was one of sorrow for Robb, one in which she tried to hide her emotions. Too frequently, we do the same while negotiating the coming out process.

Concerning friends, Robb has two rather interesting sections. One concerns an acquaintance who made disparaging, stereotypical remarks about gays. The comments froze Robb; she couldn't respond. She went to her car and sat paralyzed by the experience. Later she tells of another friend's telephone call. While on the telephone, Robb writes,

"I hadn't realized until I was standing there in the kitchen holding the phone to my ear that,...I had been harboring a vague, defensive grudge against the whole of Williamstown.... We had developed the hypersensitivity to insult common to almost every embattled minority...; it is a survival technique, but it takes an emotional toll." (pp. 214-15.)

The friend, it turned out, was wanting to support and not hurt. Robb describes the feeling that came over her as she began to understand her friend's support. The contrast with the emotional toll she mentions previously is poignant.

Through an experience Robb had with her younger son, Jack, Robb realized that the entire family had become so enmeshed in fighting for gay rights and dignity, that they had seemingly abandoned Jack. Jack was not bitter; he did not wish the family to stress gay issues less, but he almost felt he no longer belonged or had a place in the family. The section is crucial for all P-FLAG members to read and to reflect upon. As vital as our work for equality is, we must not let others in our families feel neglected. We need to maintain balance. (pp. 221-224.) 🙏

# A Personal History

Lee Olsen

I approach this endeavor with a great deal of thought and hope. My purpose in telling my story is not to complain, to blame or to plead “victim.” My goal is to share my history, trials and journey so that others may understand the struggle of homosexuality that I have experienced.

Being a homosexual is not a choice. Pushing a person who is gay to continually seek change, by reading their scriptures, saying their prayers, pleading for strength to overcome and seeking therapeutic cures, tells him or her that they will never be good enough, that being a homosexual is not acceptable.

I was born in Cache Valley, Utah, on January 16, 1959. My parents lived in the back-hills area of Grace, Idaho, and so my mother had to stay with my grandmother until I arrived. We lived for several years on a small dry farm that my father valiantly tried to keep going, doing odd jobs in the winter to feed and take care of his little family. They were a young couple with good intentions and they raised their family in the ways of their parents before them.

My father was a stern and strict man, as were his father and his grandfather. He was quick to temper and harsh with punishment. Some would say, in this day and age, that he was abusive. In my heart I know that he did the best that he could with what he knew, and that was the role that was created for him when he was a boy. My mother was a very loving woman who, to this day, is open, giving, and deeply devoted to her beliefs. Some would say that she was an over-protective mother, not allowing her children to be in harm’s way, and protecting them from their father’s actions. I would say that she did the best she could with what she knew, and that was how her mother and father raised her. I have wonderful parents, loving parents, and I love them for standing with me, supporting me, and loving me — their homosexual son.

From my earliest memories, I have known that I was different. For the longest time I had no idea what “different” was or meant. I just knew that I was not like the other little boys — my brothers, neighbors or friends. I remember at age three living in Logan and being at a friend’s house with my brothers. We had gone there to go swimming in their little pool in the back yard. My dad, brothers and little friends all went into the bedroom to change. All the other little boys hurriedly undressed and put their swimming suits on. I was incredibly uncomfortable even taking my clothes off, let alone with other people in the room. So I sat in the corner on the edge of the little bunk bed, waiting. As much as my dad coaxed and assisted, I was not going to get naked like my siblings and peers, although there was this thrill about being in the room watching them change. Where this

came from at such an early age I don’t know, but it was very real.

My father took a teaching position in a little farming community some thirty minutes west of Logan, and that is where my parents live to this day. There are so many positives and negatives about little communities. I have some fond memories and many painful ones. I can honestly say that I like that town, but I don’t think that I could ever live there now.

I remember growing up to be very confusing. As a child I seemed to be always filled with fear. Somehow, I didn’t fit in with the other little boys. They would play rough and tumble games in the yard. I was so afraid of being hurt, and even more, of being left out, that I stopped risking and just started avoiding. One day, at around age six, I sat at the window in our living room and watched the little boys playing in the yard. I

*Looking back, the thing that I find so interesting is that many of us who are homosexual are very sensitive, loving, spiritual children, and we take these things very, very seriously.*



wanted to be part of that, but for some reason I was the sissy boy. After so much of being left out or not picked for the teams, being teased and pushed away, I learned not to get involved. So to fill the void, I became interested in the things that my mom did. I hung out with Mom and learned to make dolls, embroider, clean house, and cook. That was safe and she never said or did things that would hurt me. All the little girls in the neighborhood liked to play with me because I could play their games very well.

I remember the year that my older brother was baptized. I saw that he went into the shower room where all the other little boys and their fathers went to dress. They took off all their clothes and put on white clothes.

This excited me, fascinated me and scared me to death; I would some day have to do this too. For another year I dreaded the time that I was to be baptized. My day came and there were several of us there to be baptized. I remember watching each of the fathers and their sons getting undressed and the excitement, fascination and awe. I did not understand why or what I was feeling, but I was definitely feeling it. There was one little boy who was so cute, I wanted to be him. I couldn’t wait for him to change. I waited until the very last, slowly undoing my shoes, slowly taking off socks and shirt and pants. Finally, after all the others had left, I took off my underthings and put on the little white outfit.

The summer before I was to start junior high, my folks signed me up for little league. They thought it would be a real great “boy thing”, and I’m glad they at least tried. It was miserable. I was lousy, and the other boys let me know it. I hated to go to practice because I was awkward and intimidated. I was also a “fem.” Have you ever seen a little “fem” throw a ball or run? Not a masculine sight. No one ever taught me to run like a guy. And it seemed that the ball hit me more often than I caught it. So I had my “boy” experience.

I hated gym in junior high, though it was exciting to be in the locker room with all of the other boys who had just started turning into young men. I was very small for my age, and many called me the sissy boy and other names, so getting naked with my peers caused me considerable anxiety. In ninth grade I had a health class. There was a small chapter that spoke briefly about homosexuality, and for the first time I realized that I might — might, mind you — be one of “them.” That was when the nightmare began. That was also when I began attending the church seminary program, and learned what the scriptures say about “those people.” At that time I also made the huge mistake of reading Spencer W. Kimball’s “The Miracle of Forgiveness.” I had just sealed my fate to a slow and painful death, a living hell! I had been playing “guy games” for years and masturbating and other things, and now I was condemned to hell.

A kid at fourteen or fifteen has no idea what he is intrinsically about. He has no idea what all the feelings he is experiencing are about, and then to pile all that condemnation on top of it — it was too much. I became reclusive and depressed and to this day still suffer from these disorders. You see, I was “an abomination, damned, unclean in the sight of the Lord!” Take that and wear it as a fifteen year old. Looking back, the thing that I find so interesting is that many of us who are homosexual are very sensitive, loving, spiritual children, and we take these things very, very seriously. I can’t even begin to count the times I spent on my knees as a young man, praying, begging, pleading and crying to my Father in Heaven to not let me be one of “those people!” “Please God, don’t let me be a homosexual!” To this day I have uttered such prayers. ...

*To Be Continued.*

# 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.

## DIG Awards April 6, 1997

The DIG Awards are given by the Stonewall Center to individuals who have provided exemplary and outstanding service in providing for the well-being of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered people in our state and communities.

Richard and René Van Wagoner from Family Fellowship received a DIG Award on April 6th. They have been on TV news at least twice this past year, telling their story, and showing the world how proud they are of their gay son. Richard and René co-chaired a parent conference for Family Fellowship in May of 1996. Over 120 people enjoyed a weekend of learning, sharing, and fellowshiping.

Richard has been a bishop and/or a member of a bishopric three or four times, and has served on three High Councils. René has served in many leadership positions, including Relief Society President. They hold a monthly meeting for Reconciliation in their home. Everyone in attendance enjoys good food, a great spiritual lesson, and lots of love!

Richard is a wonderful artist and has done some interesting watercolor paintings on the subject of homosexuality. One of his recent works, which was on display at the Salt Lake Arts Festival, is entitled: "Christ Ministering to the Homosexuals in Salt Lake City." Richard and René have done many things to make the world a better place. Congratulations, and thank you for all you do.

Claire Malmstrom was given a "Volunteer of the Year Award". Claire spends untold hours working for Family Fellowship. She helps with the newsletter and also mails out our materials and supplies to people. She is the organist for the Utah County Forums. She is the one who lugs our supplies to and from the meetings so that they are available for others. Aside from all she does to help Family Fellowship, she is a lovely person and a loving Mother. Thank you, Claire!

## Utah County Forum Fireside April 13, 1997

— Mildred and Gary Watts, Provo

The most recent Utah County Family Fellowship Forum was held on Sunday, April 13, 1997, at 5:00 p.m.

Duane Jennings, representing Affirmation, gave a short talk touching on the history and goals for the future of Affirmation.

Steve Mitchell performed a beautiful arrangement of "I Need Thee Every Hour" on the piano.

## Need to Update Your Mailing Address for the Newsletter?

Use e-mail! Simply send a message to Kirt Beck at: [kb.sed8em@juno.com](mailto:kb.sed8em@juno.com) and he will make the necessary changes to keep your subscription current.

A panel discussion on the subject of "How Homosexuality Has Touched Our Family" was presented. Lynette Malmstrom, LCSW, was the moderator. We had a very good cross section of people on the panel whose lives have been touched by homosexuality.

Lynette introduced each panel member and gave us a brief biography on them. The panel consisted of six individuals. Each individual then briefly talked about how they had processed and were currently processing their feelings and actions. Those participating were Sara Jordan and her sister, Rebecca; Rick Bickmore and Carol DuPue (formerly married to each other) and Guy Berryessa and his mother, Janet.

The panel members were very forthright and honest in expressing the process they have and are currently going through. Many of us in the audience were able to identify with the feelings and emotions that were expressed by the panel members. Even though the panel members did not always completely agree with each other, there was an overwhelming feeling of love expressed between them. They were truly examples of the goals of Family Fellowship of building bridges, healing relationships, and loving and serving all.

We then enjoyed a light buffet and visiting with each other. There were over 100 people in attendance.

In the future, the Utah County Forums will be held on the 5th Sunday, whenever they occur, in order not to conflict with the Reconciliation and Affirmation meetings. Our next one is scheduled for June 29.

## International Affirmation Conference August 21-24, 1997

Zion's Camp: A Family Reunion  
20th Anniversary Reunion & Celebration  
International Affirmation Conference

While Mormons all over the world celebrate the 150th anniversary of the entrance of the pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley, some of us will also be celebrating the 20th anniversary of Affirmation: Gay & Lesbian Mormons as an organization. The 19th Annual International Conference will be held in Salt Lake City, August 21-24.

This is a celebration of our diversity, culture and heritage both as Gays & Lesbians, and as people who have some relationship to the LDS Church, be that active, inactive, excommunicated or disassociated; for those who have converted and for those who are part of the "crossing the plains" history. There are many among us who are/were first generation Mormons, there are those from other parts of the world, and there are even some who have

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

been baptized into the Church as openly Lesbian and Gay people. Pioneers come in many forms!

For information, visit our web site at <http://www.affirmation.org/~affadmin>, or e-mail [Wasatchaff@aol.com](mailto:Wasatchaff@aol.com).

Send written requests to:  
Wasatch Chapter of Affirmation  
Attn: Conference Committee  
P.O. Box 526175  
SLC UT 84152

## Lord, I Would Follow Thee



Text by Susan Evans McCloud

Savior, may I learn to love thee,  
Walk the path that thou hast shown,  
Pause to help and lift another,  
Finding strength beyond my own.  
Savior, may I learn to love thee  
Lord, I would follow thee.

Who am I to judge another  
When I walk imperfectly?  
In the quiet heart is hidden  
Sorrow that the eye can't see  
Who am I to judge another?  
Lord, I would follow thee.

I would be my brother's keeper  
I would learn the healer's art.  
To the wounded and the weary  
I would show a gentle heart.  
I would be my brother's keeper  
Lord, I would follow thee.

Savior, may I love my brother  
As I know thou lovest me,  
Find in thee my strength, my beacon,  
For thy servant I would be.  
Savior, may I love my brother  
Lord, I would follow thee.