

Reunion

Summer 1998

The Family Fellowship Newsletter

Issue 16

Colleen Uhl

Family Focus

Matthew and I sat on the bed and cried together. "Mother, do you think I would choose this? Do you think I would choose persecution and not having a family?" Both pain and relief radiated from my 19-year-old son's face as we "came out" to each other. Matthew needed me to know he was gay, and I needed him to know that I had known it, probably for most of his life. Fear and judgment had kept me from ever verbalizing my feelings, even to myself.

At age four, Matthew was enrolled in a nationally renowned preschool program, Project Enlightenment. His father, Richard, and I were called in for a conference, and in hushed tones we were told that Matthew was imprinting with his mother, and that unless we did something, he could become, "well — you know — homosexual." We sold our house, Richard quit his traveling job, and we moved to Utah. We wanted to save our son, and this change would supposedly fix everything.

Back in Utah, Matthew was taunted by schoolmates and neighborhood children (most of them Mormon) calling him "fag" or "gay." A man in our neighborhood took to watching out for him and would squirt those boys with a hose to help Matthew get home safely from school. We awoke one Sunday morning, when Matthew was in seventh grade, to find our house toilet-papered, egged and graffitied with swastikas and obscenities concerning Matthew's sexuality. That afternoon a group of priests (ages 16-18) came to apologize for their miscreant deeds. Adults loved Matthew and his ability to talk to them at an adult level. Little children loved Matthew for his level of kindness and caring towards them. But his peers hated him. He was ignored at best and teased mercilessly at worst. We took Matthew to a counselor who gave him some tools for dealing with the abuse so cruelly dealt out to him.

There was a deep, unspoken frustration in Matthew, a searching for identity and placement in this world. He observed everything, felt passionately and expressed himself eloquently. Bizarre clothing choices and intense drama over minor situations highlighted a deeper longing. Matthew frightened me; he wanted to die. He was so upset and so tense that on some days I wondered about coming home and finding him dead. I think now that a great battle was taking place in Matthew as he matured. He did not fit anywhere into the mold of our Utah Mormon society, though he tried to fit. He studied the scriptures, attended seminary and scouts, and impressed adults with his knowledge of and love for our Heavenly Father.

Matthew came home from his first day at Bountiful High and announced that there was a "fag" in his class, "a weird girl and a guy with purple fingernails." All three later turned out to be homosexuals. Matthew was hired by Pioneer Memorial Theater, and there met his first "out-gays." One Christmas, he played anonymous friend to a young man whose family had disowned

him because he was gay. Matthew taught us much about non-judgment and was compassionate toward those of differing beliefs in our black-and-white world.

At nineteen, Matthew wanted to serve a mission, but couldn't reconcile it with his sexuality. After much soul searching, he opted not to go. First he told himself that he was homosexual, then he told a close friend. I suspected as much and knew that we needed to talk. He was testing the waters, not sure of my support or reaction. His father had read Matthew's journals and had struggled with how to handle the effects of this in Matthew's life. Richard is a very conservative Mormon, and after reading Spencer W. Kimball's comments on the matter, reached the fixed opinion that this could be overcome and would be with enough prayer. A well-meaning friend, guessing Matthew's sexuality, tried exorcizing female spirits from Matthew, much to Matthew's consternation and mine.

I told Matthew that I didn't think it was any of my business or anyone else's what someone did in privacy. While accepting Matthew's homosexuality openly, I feared for his life. Basically I just wanted it to all go away. I did not tell anyone nor would I even write down my fears and concerns for fear that someone

There had to be other broken hearts and people searching for answers. I just couldn't be alone.

would find out. Matthew and I kept talking, and I even went to a party where I was the only heterosexual in attendance. I learned that homosexuals looked just like I did. They weren't child molesters or perverts or weird. Most of them just wanted to live their lives, go to work and be accepted.

My other children (ranging in age from 13 to 19) know about Michael. They have been asked "is your brother gay?" My youngest son has been taunted about his big brother. It hurts.

In May, Matthew took me to see the movie Philadelphia. Every scene with the mother portrayed my own love and fear. I would see the pain radiating from her eyes, my pain. When we left the movie I cried and cried. I cried so hard I couldn't breathe, and I think it scared Matthew. I sobbed that I couldn't "do this alone anymore." I realized Matthew's sexuality wasn't just going to go away. I knew that somewhere there had to be other mothers with my same questions who had cried into pillows night after night, and felt like they were living a lie every time the subject of the family came up or a gay joke was told. There had to be other

broken hearts and people searching for answers. I just couldn't be alone.

Family Fellowship and Reconciliation have become an oasis of safety and acceptance for me. I felt awkward for about five minutes at the first meeting I attended. I asked myself, "What am I doing here?" and "Can they possibly understand what I am going through?" But they did understand my pain; it was their pain too. Being able to say "My name is Colleen and my son, Matthew, is gay," brought the greatest relief I had ever experienced. There were no looks of shock, no judgment, no recrimination. All of us there were united because of our struggle and our love for our children. I felt more accepted than I had at any time in my life. I didn't need to pretend; I didn't need to have a secret. I felt safe.

Matthew attended Reconciliation in Ogden with us. His discomfort was obvious when he commented, "This is the first time I have ever been accepted by Mormon males, and it scares the hell out of me." There are people who care and who open their homes and their hearts to these young people and their families.

I hear testimonies of a dependence upon the Savior for validation. I listen as young returned missionaries tell of their struggles, and their rejection. One elder commented, "My mother told me she wished I would have died as a child. At least then she would have had me, but now I am damned." I listen to young men who tried to get married and live "normal lives." I hear of the caustic words and epithets flung by well-meaning people. One young man asked me why people, upon learning he was gay, thought only about the sex act, no longer seeing him as a person.

Matthew and others like him are moral young people. They are not seeking one-night stands, but committed long-term relationships. I do not claim that all these young people are like Matthew, but the ones I have met are trying very hard to live by high moral standards. My heart aches with sorrow for the loneliness and isolation that I've heard recounted.

It is strange how having no answers gives many the basis for having all the answers. I don't know why or how or what God says or doesn't say about all of this. I do know that He loves me and I know that He loves my son. My son is not an evil, vile sinner as he would be told. I know that my life has been turned upside down, and that everything I believed and had put into neat little boxes has exploded. I know that there are many colors between the seemingly black-and-white issues, and that judging another for any reason is not my place. I am learning to look at the heart. I am learning to see and love in ways I had never dreamed.

I too, like Matthew, would never choose this path. I'm new in my walk here and I don't know where it will lead me or what my part is in all of this. But I'm here, choose it or not, and walk this path I will. 🙏

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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Conclusion

I returned to school to complete a degree in Family Studies and Psychology. I had spent so many years in therapy and learning about therapy that I decided to round out the experience with the formal side of my education. I enrolled at Weber State University and started down another path, working to find answers to questions still unanswered. While there, a very generous professor decided to mentor me, and we became very close friends and associates. Dr. Randy Chatelain had some mixed feelings about homosexuals and where he placed them in his life. Because we had achieved such a close bond, I decided one day to open up and seek some guidance as to my issue. He was surprised, yet loving and supportive, and always there to provide me with assistance. We talked on many levels. He created opportunities for me to process my emotions and thoughts. One day, he suggested an organization named Evergreen, and I sought this group out.

My first meeting was at the LDS Social Services building in Ogden, Utah. I remember driving past the building several times, very sick to my stomach, and very much afraid. I finally worked up the courage to go in, so I parked my car around the back of the building and entered through a side door. The man who had interviewed me a few days before met me in hall, shook my hand and led me to a room where there were about twenty other men gathered together. I remember noticing several men that I knew. (And there were a few others who knew me because of the tapes my brother and I had recorded for the LDS music market.) Sheer panic ran through my veins, and all I wanted to do was run. The man who greeted me held on to my arm and whispered, "It's going to be all right. You're safe here." I sat down and quietly tried to blend in with the furniture.

They were an interesting and diverse group of men. Their ages ranged from nineteen to sixty-four and their personalities went from rough hellion to high councilman. They had a lesson which talked about some of the reasons that homosexual men do the things they do. That was just the tip of the iceberg, but it was a start to understanding. Later we broke into small groups, and those who wanted to, spoke of their struggles. For the first time in my life, I felt that I was no longer alone, that I was not the only one who suffered from this awful plague. It was like looking up into the midnight sky, seeing a star and knowing there were others like it out there. It's hard to explain, but after hiding all those years and being reclusive to avoid discovery, I suddenly felt that I could have and make friends and share my confusion and find some support. This was the start of something good.

I became involved in the sports program that was created by a wonderful therapist named Dan Gray. I faithfully attended basketball every Saturday morning in Salt Lake. I was quite intimidated, having never played the sport, but I wanted to learn to be "one of the guys." I felt like such a nerd when I would shoot the ball. The only thing that was of comfort was that the other forty guys there were just as nerdy. In fact, I was

probably one of the better players. I remember the excitement the first time the ball spun on the rim of the basket, and after several seconds finally went through. I was ecstatic.

One Saturday, I saw a very handsome young man who had a wonderful smile and a great sense of humor. He smiled back at me. A group of us went to breakfast after the practice and I sat next to this great guy. We quickly became friends and decided to get together and do something. The first time we got together we set some boundaries on behavior and vocabulary. From there the friendship developed. We planned activities like camping out, walks, tennis, and sitting on mountain sides talking. Each time that we were together the bond became stronger. When I was hurting the most, I knew Jerry would put his arms around me and hold me and comfort me, and I would feel better.

We have stayed true to our commitments and to this day we have never violated that trust. We have never been sexually intimate or even allowed it to be discussed. I can honestly say that I love this man more than I have loved anyone. You see, so many people think that being gay is about having promiscuous sex with several partners. That may be a behavior that is an outcome of other behaviors (I have learned a lot about this through Evergreen) but the bottom line is love. I have never had sex with Jerry, and I love him, I want to be with him spiritually, emotionally, as a partner, friend, companion, and then possibly my intimate other. What I feel is real and it is love. And those who are heterosexual and conclude that this cannot possibly be so, have nothing to base their opinions on, for they have not lived as I live nor feel as I feel. I don't discount their heterosexual thoughts, emotions, and love, though for some reason they feel that they can discount mine. This leaves me confused and hurt.

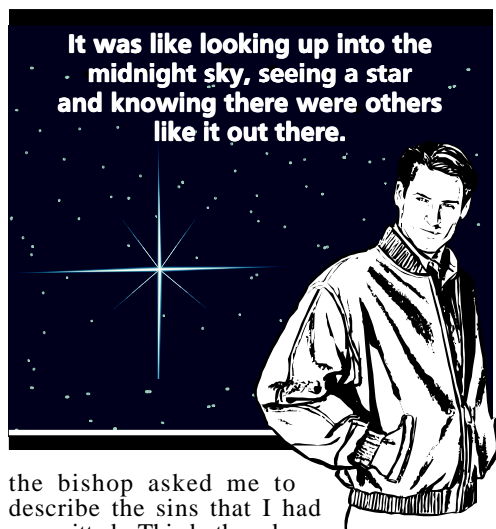
I worked very hard in the Evergreen process. I read all the books that I could get my hands on, I talked to all the professionals in the field who would talk to me, and I stayed true to my commitments to not devalue my brothers in the fight. Most of all, I said earnest prayers and made commitments to God to please release me from this trial, and let me be the husband that Tina deserved. I was diligent in my studies at school and went through intense Gestalt training courses to help me deal with the guilt and self-loathing. I was doing everything in my power to be what I wanted to be — to create "change."

Finally, after much consideration and prayer, I decided to go to my bishop to try to get my life in order and to be worthy of the loving woman who had given me so much. I made an appointment, met with him and told him my secret. He was kind, though very "black-and-white." He knew very little about homosexuality other than the vague pamphlet from the church that he said gave him instructions. He started to pass judgements on me that I did not deserve. So, at that time I told him that he had no business judging me until he understood me. Then I gave him one of the books that I had been reading about homosexuality and its causes. I told him that after he had read it and gained some understanding of the issue, then we would talk.

He wanted me to get my spiritual life in order before he took any further steps. This offended me, as I have always been deeply spiritual. My relationship with my Father in Heaven has always

been very one-on-one, but I went about doing the things that the bishop asked. There was so much anger in me at that time. Here was a man, sitting in judgment over me, who had no training, no insight or understanding of how to deal with or even comprehend the issue that he was judging me for. After many months I finally approached him again, because I could not take the pressure anymore. I told him to hold his court and get it over with. He called the Stake President and asked for permission to keep the case in his jurisdiction.

On a Sunday afternoon, I walked into the bishop's office, where his two counselors and the ward clerk sat waiting. Here were two men whom I deeply respected, and now they would know just what I was. It killed me that they would know my secret. We started with prayer, and then



the bishop asked me to describe the sins that I had committed. This bothered me; it wasn't right. I sat and said nothing. Then the Bishop said that he would describe some of the things we had discussed. I stopped him and told him that this was wrong. "If you are to judge me, you have to know me." So I started my story, at the beginning. I told them of the abuse in school and the confusion and pain of being an abomination for all of those years, how the experience of the mission had been so traumatic, the nervous breakdown and falling in love with my companions. I shared the different therapies in detail and the self-hatred that accompanied every failed try. I told how I prayed, every night, for strength and begged the Lord to take it away, or better yet to take me home.

I looked over and saw tears running down Brother Bowe's face. I wanted them to know how it was to feel like you were always sitting on the outside looking in. I had desperately wanted to be just one of the guys, to belong. I described how I would sit in priesthood meeting, feeling like an alien, physically sick because I didn't belong, and the whole time hating myself because I had deep attractions for many of the men in the room. Some of them were people that I loved; they had fellowshiped me and had done things with my wife and me. It was the love that triggered the attractions. I told them that it pained me deeply, knowing that I would never be a man like them, that I would never fit in, or be the husband that Tina deserved. I looked over and saw Brother Gappmeyer wipe tears from his face. He asked me, "How can I help?" I looked at him and said, "Please, when you see me, don't shame me. I can do that myself. When you see me in the hall or on the street, please don't look away, or I will be worth nothing." I told them that no matter how hard I worked at it and even after all

the therapies, I am still a homosexual.

Then the Bishop looked at me and said, "You just didn't want it bad enough!" I died inside. Nobody had wanted it more than I had, and then I had to deal with this extra guilt. At that point I just left it up to them. They called Tina for her statement. It turned out that she was a witness for me and not against me. She explained all that we had been through together and how hard I had worked. Sure, I had fallen many times, but I continued to fight. The Bishop asked her how I could make restitution to her. She explained that I did not owe her anything. He told her that I had broken my covenants with her and that I had offended her womanhood. He said that I owed her restitution to make my wrongs into rights. Again she said that I owed her nothing. She explained to him that if I had been doing this with women for all of these years, that it would have offended her womanhood. But this was something that I had struggled with since I was a child. She was so loving and supportive. I have truly been blessed with an angel as my wife and friend. I was put on probation for one year, and then they would make another determination after that point.

One night, after all of this, I was feeling quite vulnerable and I went into Tina's room. I just wanted to be held. I started to speak, and no words would come. Suddenly my eyes filled with tears and I could not utter a word. Tina sat and looked at me, confused, not knowing what was wrong. Finally I spoke and said I was sorry and left the room. After several minutes, I regained some composure and again approached her room. I opened my mouth and again no words would come, just more tears, and I had to leave. I made the approach several more times and each time I could not speak. I was feeling so much pain and fear, and somewhere deep inside, I knew that I was risking rejection.

Finally I fought through the tears and reached out and spoke. "Tina, would you please hold me." She looked back at me, with great sadness in her eyes. She paused and then she said, "I can't do that, I don't love you anymore." She had worked for so many years to shut down her emotions and needs, that when I approached her, she could not take the risk of being hurt. She simply could not. She loved me, like a brother; she no longer loved me as a husband. Then she said, "I think we need to separate." I said, "You mean like as in live apart until we sort this out?" She said "No, I mean divorce. I just can't do this anymore."

My whole system went into shock; my brain shut down. My only thought was, "Oh dear God, now I'm just a lousy homosexual." I got in my car, half dressed, and drove for hours. I didn't know where I was going and I really didn't care. I drove thoughtlessly — I'm lucky I didn't kill someone — all I wanted to do was kill myself. I fought with myself over and over and finally decided that dying was the only way to make the pain stop for good. So I went to Jerry's house to tell him I loved him and to let him know how much he had made a difference in my life. I arrived at one or two in the morning; I wasn't clear about the time — it didn't matter anymore. I put my arms around him, hugged him, and told him I loved him. Then I went to leave. Sensing something was wrong Jerry

grabbed me and started to quiz me. I started to cry. I needed to leave now! I had things to finish. He threw me on the floor and wrestled me until I was so tired I couldn't move. Quietly I told him that Tina wanted a divorce and now I was nothing.

After a very long time, and after I had gained some sense of control, Jerry told me that he would either take me to the hospital or home but he wasn't going to let me be alone. I told him to take me home. I knew that I had a bottle of pills there, and that would be easier than wrecking the car. When we arrived at my house, I went in and lay down on the couch. Jerry told me to get some rest and that he would come back on his lunch to check on me. Tina had left, probably gone to work. Shortly after Jerry left, I got the bottle of pills and took them. I figured I would be gone before he ever returned.

Jerry said that around mid-morning he started having the feeling that he should get back to me as quickly as possible. It bothered him for a short while, and then he submitted, grabbed some work and returned to my house. When he came in, he found me on the couch, semi-conscious and quite out of it. He said that he ran downstairs, got on his knees, and asked the Lord to help him know what he should do. Immediately the answer came to get me to the hospital. He piled me into the car and went directly to the emergency room where I was treated for medication overdose. I was pretty much gone.

After they treated me and got things working again, I was committed to the psych ward at McKay-Dee Hospital, where I underwent treatment for suicide. Tina visited me a couple of times that I remember. She told me that she loved me, but that she could no longer live this way and that I needed to be free. I remember a couple of people, but not a lot about the experience. I was very heavily drugged and have lost a lot of memory of that time.

I have spent the last year trying to regain my life, my memory, and most of all, some sense of value. I have wanted to die so many times. I am lonely and hurt and tired. I don't understand why I have had to go through all of this, though recently I have come to a space of calm and peace. You see, I am no longer trying to be something that I cannot be: a heterosexual man.

For the first time in my life I am able to say, I am a spiritual man, I am a gifted man, I am a loving man, I am a masculine man, and I am a gay man. And the fact that I am gay in no way negates or takes away the value of any of those other things. I have spent my lifetime being an abomination, unclean and unworthy, a being with no value; I have spent my lifetime waiting to die, because that was the only way it would be different. Now my glass is no longer half empty, but rather, half full. I plan to fill the rest of it with living, acceptance, and unconditional love for myself and those around me. There are so many of us — gifted, loving, spiritual and bright homosexual men who have either wasted our lives or taken our lives because somewhere, at some time, our society, our church, or our family has taken away our value. I am not an abomination or unclean. I have value and integrity. I am a homosexual and I know that if I am a loving man, and live a loving life, Father In Heaven and the Savior will take care of me. I have to trust and believe this, in the deepest part of my soul, and I know it is true. 🙏

Need to Update Your Mailing Address for the Newsletter?

Use e-mail! Simply send a message to Kirt Beck at: kbrc@alaska.net and he will make the necessary changes to keep your subscription current.

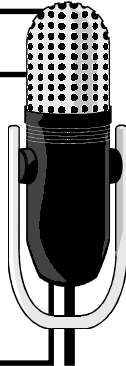
Family Service

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.

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

Announcement

The next Family Fellowship Conference on Homosexuality will be held in conjunction with the Four-Corners Regional PFLAG Conference at the Little America Hotel in Salt Lake City, June 11-13, 1999. Mark it on your calendars now. It promises to be an outstanding conference!



"Our Children at Risk" Family Fellowship Conference May 1-3, 1998

The Family Fellowship conference was held at the University of Utah and the Little America Hotel, Friday, May 1st through Sunday, May 3rd, 1998.

Gary Remafedi, M.D., M.P.H., and Associate Professor of Pediatrics from the University of Minnesota, was the keynote speaker. His keynote address entitled, "Caring for Our Gay and Lesbian Youth," was well presented and informative about the risks encountered by our gay children as they discover their same-sex attractions in our largely disapproving and misinformed society.

There were approximately 130 people in attendance including Nancy MacDonald, national PFLAG president who addressed the conference during the Saturday luncheon.

Doug Haldeman, Ph.D., Chairman of the American Psychological Association Committee on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns gave an outstanding presentation on conversion therapy.

The personal stories session was once again a highlight with poignant presentations from Ben Jarvis, Jim Jamison, Dwight Cook and Lanette Graves.

The parent panel entitled "Lessons from the Titanic — Survival Techniques for Parents" was exceptional and was the major source for an informational article published in the Salt Lake Tribune.

Gary Watts, Frank Mensel, Mac Madsen, Glenda Russell and Janis Bohan all contributed to what everyone considered an outstanding conference!

Family Fellowship Forum August 30, 1998

— Mildred and Gary Watts, Provo

The next Family Fellowship Forum is scheduled for Sunday, August 30th, in the Behavioral Science Auditorium on the University of Utah campus at 5:00 p.m. It promises to be an exceptional meeting. Simon LeVay, Ph.D., well known for his 1991 report in Science on brain differences between gay and

straight men will be the speaker. His lecture is entitled: "Queer Science: The Use and Abuse of Research into Homosexuality." The British born neuroscientist has been on the faculty of Harvard Medical School and the Salk Institute in San Diego, but is now a freelance writer. He is the author of The Sexual Brain, City of Friends (with Elisabeth Nonas), the biomedical thriller Albrick's Gold, and the forthcoming The Earth in Turmoil. He currently lives in West Hollywood, California.

1998 Affirmation Conference September 4-6, 1998

Preparations are already well underway for the annual conference of Affirmation: Gay & Lesbian Mormons, to be held over Labor Day weekend, September 4 through 6, 1998, in Portland, Oregon.

The conference committee is currently organizing speakers and activities for the conference weekend. Persons and groups who are interested in presenting a workshop or participating in the conference are invited to contact Henry Miller, the conference chair, by e-mail at rfhm@northwest.com or by phone at (503) 288-2037.



RACHELLE L. KARMAN

This will be the 21st annual conference for an organization that has been largely unrecognized by its own church. According to Scott MacKay, Affirmation Executive Director, "Affirmation is dedicated to

servicing the needs of the church's gay and lesbian members and ex-members. The church leadership has formally denied that we even exist, and despite the value the church claims to place on the family, its hostility toward gays actually drives families apart.

The conference is a unique opportunity to help heal wounds, bridge differences, and show people the true meaning of family." This annual conference has repeatedly been "the highlight of the year" for Mormon lesbians and gays, some calling it "life-changing."

Workshops focus on topics such as same-sex marriage, issues of special concern to youth, internalized homophobia, surviving excommunication, alternate paths to spirituality, and understanding and dealing with the anti-gay political right. There will also be many opportunities for fun and entertainment, including a brunch cruise down the Willamette River.

Also participating will be representatives from Family Fellowship, an organization for Mormon parents of gays and lesbians, as well as Gamofites, a support group for gay Mormon fathers.

Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons, is a nonprofit educational fellowship group serving gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints, their families and friends since 1977. It is a place for open, honest dialogue, friendship and support. All are welcome, regardless of gender, orientation or religious affiliation.

If you would like more information, Affirmation may be contacted by mail at its headquarters, P. O. Box 46022, Los Angeles CA, 90046, by phone at (213) 255-7251, or through the Internet at <http://www.affirmation.org>

RACHELLE L. KARMAN NOW'S THE TIME

*So you think that I'm untrue, in what I say and do.
 The changes that I'm going through are difficult for you.*

*What you need to realize is I've worked these through and through,
 situations and complications, and now it's time for you.*

*Time I needed to reflect, and not have you object.
 Direction that I sought to find, along with peace of mind.*

*Changes with me now you face, and at a different pace.
 What is right for you you see, may not be right for me.*

Now's the time to set me free, to live my life as it ought to be.

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Volunteers Who Wish to Help Family Fellowship

Several folks have contacted Family Fellowship wondering what they can do to help. We continue to feel the most helpful thing you can do right now is to make a family history of your experiences with gay and lesbian family members. This could be an in depth account of the type published in our booklet series or a shorter account which could be included in the newsletter. For more information, please call Claire Malmstrom at (801) 768-9112.