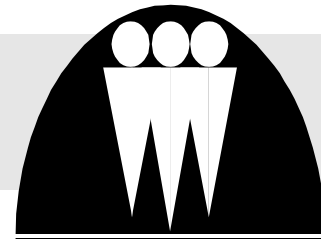


Reunion

Winter 1999

The Family Fellowship Newsletter



Issue 17

Family Focus

Marge and Bill Bradshaw

*To our children: Ben and Clare,
Brett and Jeff, with love*

We were witnesses to two special occasions this past year, each occurring on a Saturday, four and one-half months apart. In June there was a wedding. The bride was a radiantly lovely young woman; the groom, a strikingly handsome young man. If you were so inclined, you could have called the couple straight, perhaps referring to the way he was standing beside her, or the path of her gaze toward his face.

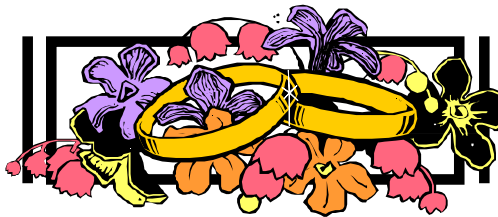
As we looked around, the dominant impression of the day was one of families — two groups of people, each held together by the sturdy ties of heredity and years of familiarity. Gaining familiarity is indeed a family-like process, and it was taking place there between those who cared about her and those who cared about him. In any other setting it would have taken months for people who were otherwise strangers to form such significant bonds. But her parents, uncles, aunts and cousins met their counterparts from his side, and all the rules that normally govern time and space were suspended.

Pre-school flower girls in starch-stiffened white dresses felt older, and grandmothers in spray-stiffened white hair felt younger. Men whose pedigrees traced to Italy and Ireland shook hands warmly with each other and with women whose maiden names had origins in places like Copenhagen and even Seoul. Adult seniors who had only just met found they had much more in common than the right to discount theater tickets, and high school seniors made similar discoveries. All the conversations seemed to be animated by smiles and filled with frequent statements of, "Well isn't that a coincidence." Hometowns, actually thousands of miles apart, converged to within walking distance of each other. In the absence of births, families got bigger through exchange as empty bedrooms were offered to future traveling guests — no reservations nor references required.

During the ceremony itself we were immersed in an almost paradoxical combination of solemnity and joy. There was both reverence and exultation. The words that were spoken during the ceremony itself committed the participants to, and reminded the rest of us of, the highest and most noble of

human aspirations attached to their covenant — fidelity, responsibility, work, patience, kindness, sacrifice, happiness — abstractions which they promised to make realities. It was not hard to imagine that among his silent resolves was thoughtfulness, as in getting up in the middle of the night to take care of her if she were ill. Her unspoken list surely must have included earning the title of best friend with tenderness and material gifts of her own design. The already married among us paused to consider how faithful we had been to those same pledges made years earlier, probably deciding that we could and would do better.

The words that were spoken during the ceremony itself committed the participants to ... the highest and most noble of human aspirations



We made the vows again in private.

After the ceremony, in another place, there was food and laughter, and dancing — the groom with his Mom, the bride with her Dad. The bride's parents danced, the groom's parents danced, then they traded partners. Wives danced with husbands, boyfriends danced with girlfriends. It was a gay occasion.

We are convinced that everyone at the wedding was finding that there was more human goodness in the world than we had been aware of. It was a very pleasant way to be reminded. We were also convinced that the Heavenly Father of us all was pleased.

In October, literally and figuratively on the opposite side of the continent, there was another commitment ceremony. Each of the two partners was a tall, athletic-looking, affable young man. If you were so inclined, you could have called the couple non-straight, perhaps referring to the way they were standing as they

faced each other, or the paths of their reciprocal looks of admiration and affection.

As we looked around, the dominant impression was one of families, although there was quite a diversity present. All the sets of parents were there, supportive, honoring their sons. Portions of the extended families were there as well, expressing loyalty to loved ones. Some families consisted only of women. Some families consisted only of men. The two partners had each attracted friends, from the most interesting variety of circumstances, who cared deeply and came to show their support. These relationships appeared so binding that there was little distinction between friendship and kinship. So in spite of the fact that there were some obvious differences among us, the eclecticism did not restrain the familiarity. There were lots of exchanges between those who cared about him, and those who cared about the other him. We were separate parts of a complex web of relationships made intimate through love. That day, in the absence of births, families got bigger through the recognition that our similarities are more important than our differences. And yet, a certain wistfulness accompanied our realization that occasions such as this one are not always family gatherings — there's frequently a lot of deliberate absenteeism.

The words that were spoken during the ceremony itself committed the participants to, and reminded the rest of us of, the highest and most noble of human aspirations attached to their covenant — fidelity, responsibility, work, patience, kindness, sacrifice — abstractions which they promised to make realities. It was not hard to imagine that each was making silent resolves, like getting up in the middle of the night to take care of the other who was ill, or earning the title of best friend by being supportive, encouraging, and honest. The content of the vows and the spirit that accompanied them were good, legitimate and important. We were made to wonder, which of these very moral sentiments were inconsistent with applying legal sanction to such a covenant?

After the ceremony, in another place, there was food and laughter, and dancing — each groom with his Mom. The parents of each man danced together, then they traded partners. Some men danced with men. Some women danced with women. Boyfriends danced with girlfriends. Grandpas danced with granddaughters. We paid attention to the faces of the dancers, and saw their delight and fondness and companionship and fidelity and endearment. It was a gay occasion.

It seemed that everyone present was finding that there was more human goodness in the world than we had been aware of, and that the Heavenly Father of us all was pleased. 🙏

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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The Bookshelf

Review by James F. Cartwright

Beyond Acceptance: Parents of Lesbians and Gays Talk About Their Experiences.

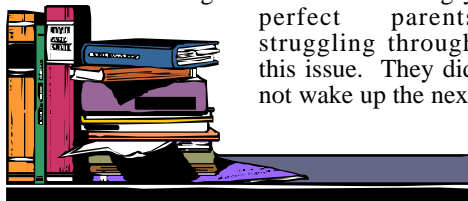
by Griffin, Carolyn Welch;
Marian J. Wirth and Arthur G. Wirth

Revised Edition
New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996©.

This book tells the stories from the point of view of various parents of gay men and lesbians. The stories are told in segments covering the chronological processes: finding out; learning from books; learning from others; challenging perceptions, including religious beliefs; coming out to others; and taking a stand. The book then has a chapter on what our society may become as contrasted with what it now is and has been. It concludes with a chapter on AIDS consisting of excerpts from the journal that Carolyn Welch Griffin wrote over the ten years she and her family have dealt with AIDS first hand, from just prior to her son Greg's discovering that he had AIDS.

It is easy, perhaps, for parents new to the discovery that a child is gay, to feel that other parents seem to have "everything all together" while they themselves have so much to struggle through. The value of this book lies in its showing even those seemingly

perfect parents struggling through this issue. They did not wake up the next



day dedicated activists for lesbian and gay rights.

Perhaps the greatest contribution this book can make to parents is that none have made this transition without some problems, without some words or actions they later regret. It is okay if you err, if you commit a "no-no." You are not alone. The important step, one we need to repeat frequently, is to forgive ourselves as well as others.

The other highly significant contribution of this book lies in the chapter on AIDS. In Carolyn Griffin's summary, she lists the discoveries that have helped her and her family. I quote some of these:

- Each person grieves in her or his own way.
- All family members need support.
- The person with AIDS needs to make as many decisions as he or she possibly can.
- Hope is followed by disappointment, followed by hope, followed by disappointment. [It is a] yo-yo existence.
- Facing death often creates an unconditional appreciation of life.
- The sanctity of gay relationships, really all relationships, deserves our utmost respect.
- Being informed gives more choices. The more the choices were acted on, the better were our physical and emotional conditions....
- The more we contacted and supported others, the more we helped ourselves. Keeping a journal [helped significantly].
- We recognize that when the AIDS situation deteriorates, our irritability level increases.
- We don't have to deal with AIDS all the time.

A Personal History

Ryan Nay

I was born and raised a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I did not have the childhood of a typical Mormon though. I grew up in a small town and my parents were not active in attending church. I now see this as a benefit, for if my parents had stuffed the gospel down my throat, I would probably want nothing to do with it today. Instead, I embraced Mormonism in high school and developed a strong conviction that it was true.

In my early years of life, I always knew I was different from other boys, but I did not know why. I never related well with other boys and was kind of a loner. I was terrible at sports, and would occasionally be called 'sissy' or 'faggot'. But I didn't know what those words meant. I don't think the boys calling me those names knew what they meant either. I had a

few distant friends that were guys, but my closest friends through elementary school years were girls. At that age, my relationship with my father was not that great either. He was a busy man who was always working. Nevertheless, he was still a good father.

At the age of nine, my parents divorced and my siblings and I moved to Salt Lake City with our mother. Those were difficult years. She worked hard to support us and we managed to stay close. I was the oldest, with a younger brother and sister. After a couple years my mother fell in love with a guy who is now my stepfather. Even though it was rough on all of us, he provided me with essential fathering during my early teen years. I then realized that I needed to get to know my biological father. At age 15, I moved back with my father at the place where I had grown up. Then as my high school years began, I began to realize why I was different: I was attracted to other boys.

My attractions and fantasies did not bother me at first. I figured they were phases of

growing up and would go away soon. I became more concerned as my feelings intensified through my high school years. I soon realized that the words 'homosexual', 'gay', 'queer' and 'faggot' were applied to the feelings that I felt. I did not want to be 'that way'. I then decided I would do everything I could to make my homosexual feelings go away.

I started looking at women. I forced myself to fantasize about them in my moments of privacy. I realized that I needed a girlfriend. I figured that if I had a girlfriend I would become straight, so that was my quest. I was able to develop several crushes on girls in high school, which was encouraging, even though I still fantasized about boys on a regular basis. I dated and went to all the local dances. But in the end, I could not find anybody to call my girlfriend. The great thing about my high school years was that I was able to develop a wonderful relationship with my dad, and we have really gotten to know each other well.

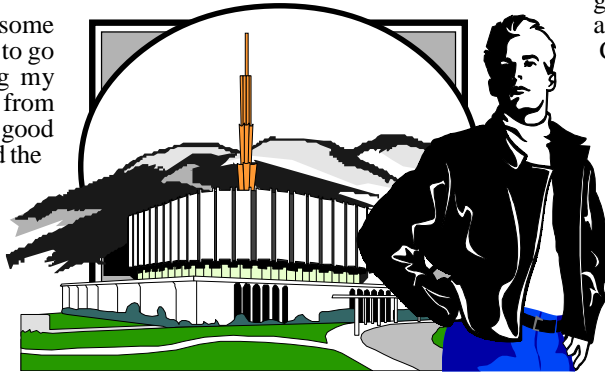
My senior year was a time to make some decisions about my life. I really wanted to go on a mission, but my fears regarding my homosexual feelings pushed me away from that. Ironically, after being prodded by a good friend to talk to an army recruiter, I joined the army. I figured that four years in the army would buy me enough time to get out of this phase. My first tour was in Germany. After settling down and getting used to the military lifestyle, I had the opportunity to slip away from base and explore. These were times of great excitement and depression. The guilt I felt pushed me into confiding my homosexual feelings to a local LDS ecclesiastical leader. He was warm and understanding about my situation. He basically followed the steps and counsel spelled out in the church's manual: "Understanding and Helping Those Who Have Homosexual Problems: Suggestions for Ecclesiastical Leaders."

This process continued into my second tour at Fort Riley, Kansas, with confessions to my local leaders, who were all warm and loving. This was good for me at the time because I wanted to change. My life was a series of spiritual highs and lows. I started to fall in love with a guy I was dating in Kansas City. This scared me, and about the same time I discovered Evergreen International and Affirmation on the Internet. These two organizations were resources for Mormons struggling with homosexual feelings. They differed in their missions and had opposite goals. Evergreen supports the Church's position about homosexuality being unnatural, and strives to help people become straight through a process called reparative therapy. Affirmation affirms that homosexuality can be something positive, and helps people accept their orientation as part of their life. My understanding of the gospel at the time told me to reject Affirmation, leave my current boyfriend and embrace Evergreen.

Because of my location, I could not attend Evergreen meetings on a regular basis, so I started reading the books on reparative therapy that Evergreen sent me. Reparative therapy's basic philosophy is that homosexuality developed out of same-gender emotional needs that were not fulfilled in our youth. Those

emotional needs could have developed from negative relationships with our same-sex parent or peers. The underlying idea was that these same-sex emotional needs were eroticized during puberty. Reparative therapy also notes that a person's homosexual drive is strong, and will never go away until their same-sex emotional needs are fulfilled. The therapeutic approach was to develop non-sexual same-sex relationships to affirm our masculinity. By doing this, and by having faith in the Lord, Evergreen taught that a person could fulfill their needs and make a healthy transition to heterosexuality.

The causes outlined in reparative therapy seemed to fit my background, so I tried to believe their therapeutic approach would also work with me. What I soon realized was that I had already developed meaningful non-sexual relationships with many guys, and currently had a healthy relationship with my dad. I also



had a rock-solid faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet I still had intense homosexual feelings. Ironically, I did not gain a healthy affirmation of my masculinity until I accepted myself as a homosexual.

Many positive things happened during this time. I learned how to talk about my homosexual feelings with others, and I eventually told my parents about my struggles. It was difficult for them, but they supported me in my endeavors. After almost four years in the Army, I finally realized that my homosexual feelings were not going to go away. I accepted the fact that I was gay. Essentially, Evergreen helped me to come out.

The realization that I was gay was a blow to my personal spirituality. I had a true and deep conviction of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I will never forget the day in high school when I first felt the Holy Ghost. I was talking with a good friend who was not LDS about the Book of Mormon. I suddenly got cold chills all over me. My heart started pounding real fast. An intense feeling rushed through my body. An impression hit my mind, and I suddenly found myself telling my friend that I "knew" the Book of Mormon was true. I had never said that before. I was in tears. It was the most wonderful feeling I have ever felt in my life. Since that day, the Holy Ghost had touched my life many times. I could not deny what I knew to be true. The truth of my gayness, however, did not come by the power of the Holy Ghost. I felt that the Lord had played a cruel joke on me. Here I was with a testimony of the gospel, along with strong homosexual feelings, and the Lord was telling me "no." Was I doomed to misery for the rest of my life? My understanding of the

gospel was that man was supposed to experience joy in this lifetime. But I was experiencing a serious paradox.

The only other place I could turn to was Affirmation. I had once rejected this group as a bunch of apostates that did nothing but criticize the Church. After a more serious investigation into Affirmation, I recognized the diversity in the organization, and that there were others who felt the same way I did. In fact, the existence of Affirmation saved my life. Several times after coming out, I was close to killing myself; I thought that death was better than a lifetime of misery.

My adherence to standards and principles as taught by the LDS church has been a continuing transformation for me. My understanding of Christ and His atonement for all mankind has continued to grow. I seek guidance from the Holy Ghost on all important spiritual matters. The times that I lack that guidance are the times I realize I need to repent and continue to build my relationship with Christ through keeping His commandments. This has been very difficult for me to do.

When my activity in the Church was at its highest, my motivation to keep the commandments was based on the Church's goals set here in mortality. Those goals included obtaining the Melchizedek Priesthood, going to the temple, preparing for a mission and receiving church ordinances. I strongly believe in the standards outlined by the Church except for one. The Church teaches that I cannot be involved in a loving monogamous relationship with a member of the same gender. In the eyes of many

Mormons, a loving homosexual relationship has no more merit in God's eyes than promiscuity. I don't believe the Lord shares this view. I believe the Lord condemns the wiles of the popular homosexual lifestyle, but he does not condemn true homosexual love. That is my personal belief.

I look forward to the day when we as God's children can quit judging each other and learn to live in harmony. My belief is that God wants me to achieve perfection to return to His presence. I choose to believe in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Mediator between me and my Heavenly Father. I testify that He is God's son, that his saving power is beyond description and is real. I also believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is a true and living church. For me, the church will always be a tool to help me exercise my faith in Christ, whether I am an official member or not. I believe that someday the church will be ready to receive a revelation from the Lord regarding this difficult issue. I now sustain Gordon B. Hinckley as the Lord's mouthpiece, or any of his predecessors who may receive that revelation.

For the time being, I must follow my heart and strive to do what I know is right. I may stumble at times, but I always get up and try again. I am very thankful for the blessings the Lord has poured into my life, even the blessing of a homosexual orientation. My hope is to find someone to share my life with, to experience all the joys, pains, and frustrations that life gives us. The purpose of life is to obtain joy. There is no greater joy than that of the Lord's love. This is my testimony. 🙏

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

November 29, 1998 & February 7, 1999

— Max and Janet Berryessa, Provo

The quarterly meeting of Family Fellowship was held on November 29 in the Clark Auditorium of the Utah Valley Regional Medical Center. The guest speaker was Caitlin Ryan, MSW, an award winning clinical social worker. An educator and researcher, she has worked on lesbian and gay health and mental health issues since the 1970's. She reviewed the key topics contained in the new book, "Lesbian & Gay Youth: Care and Counseling," which she so-authored with Dr. Donna Futterman of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

Following Ms. Ryan's presentation, Jackie Biskupski, Utah's first openly gay individual to be elected to a state political office, spoke briefly of her background and what she desired to accomplish in her new calling.

Claire Malmstrom conducted the Family Fellowship Forum held on February 7.

Max and Janet Berryessa and Bill Bradshaw shared with us the recent commitment ceremonies of their sons and partners. We were able to watch video footage, hear their perspectives and ask questions.

Lee Olsen sang three very beautiful and appropriate musical numbers. Prayers were given by Merle and Clayton White.

Following the meeting a light buffet and visiting with old friends and getting acquainted with new ones was enjoyed by all.

"Liberty and Justice for All" The Intermountain Conference on Homosexuality June 11-12, 1999

— Mildred and Gary Watts, Provo

The Four Corners Regional PFLAG (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and Family Fellowship are sponsoring the Intermountain Conference on Homosexuality at the Little America Hotel in Salt Lake City, Utah on June 11th and 12th. All PFLAG and Family Fellowship members, as well as professionals, teachers, students, friends and families are invited to attend and explore the diverse issues and dilemmas associated with homosexuality. A variety of workshops will include discussions on the biologic and social aspects of homosexuality including the controversies in public education, sexuality and the law, sexuality and spirituality and personal and family relationships.

Douglas Haldeman, Counseling Psychologist, Seattle, Washington, will address issues surrounding appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation, specifically addressing the ads placed in the major newspapers by the Christian Coalition telling

people that they could change their sexuality. Other guest faculty will include among many others: Paul Beeman, International President of PFLAG; Evan Wolfson, Lambda Legal Defense Attorney; Connie Watts-Edwards, Southeast Executive Director of Planned Parenthood; Howard Best, Director, PFLAG; Amity Buxton, Author of *The Other Side of the Closet: The Coming-Out Crisis for Straight Spouses and Family*; Ruth Grove and Jean Hodges, leading advocates for safe schools.

All interested individuals are invited to join us in an informative and enriching encounter that will lead to greater understanding of homosexuality in all its diversity.

There will be supplementary activities for Family Fellowship and PFLAG parents on Saturday evening following conclusion of the basic conference workshops. All parents of gay and lesbian children are also invited to join together to carry the 300-foot rainbow flag in the Salt Lake City's Gay Pride Parade which is scheduled Sunday, June 13th, at 9:00 a.m. beginning at the State Capitol Building.

Pre-registration deadline: Tuesday, June 1st. Registration Fees: \$60 per person. Includes Friday evening dinner, keynote address, admission to all workshops, and Saturday brunch.

Registrar for the conference is Gerry Johnston, 801-568-1141. Note: registration fees do not include hotel accommodations. A block of rooms has been reserved at Little America Hotel, 500 South Main Street, for all registrants coming from outside the city. Tower Suites: \$99 Single/Double. Garden Rooms: \$89 Single/Double. Registrants should make their own reservations: Call (800) 437-5288 by May 11, 1999. Be sure to indicate that you will be attending the conference in order to obtain the above rates. Late or Same-day registration Fees: Add \$15.

Affirmation Activities

April 2, 4 and October 8-10, 1999

Friday, April 2, 7:00 p.m. — Seventh Annual Gay & Lesbian Mission Reunion, sponsored by Affirmation: Wasatch Chapter. Held at the Metropolitan Community Church, 823 South 600 East in Salt Lake City.

Call Duane at 801-486-6977 or e-mail at WasatchAff@aol.com

Sunday, April 4, 5:00 p.m. — Conference Sunday Fireside at Metropolitan Community Church. Inspirational speaker, music and refreshments. 823 South 600 East in SLC.

October 8 - 10 — "High On A Mountain Top Our Banner is Unfurled." The 21st annual Affirmation Conference in Lake Tahoe, CA/NV., at Resort Lake Tahoe, Embassy Suites. For information, contact Affirmation at WasatchAff@aol.com, or visit the National Website at <http://www.affirmation.org>. Three days of activities, hiking, workshops, guest speakers, entertainment, Sunday devotional, eating and lots more.

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

headlines



The board of trustees of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) passed a resolution in December 1998, at their quarterly meeting in Denver, that condemns the practice of "reparative therapy." The APA's rebuke reaffirmed the scientific and mental health community's long standing objection to this practice which attempts to convert homosexuals to heterosexuals.

The APA's resolution, which passed unanimously, was spurred by a million-dollar ad campaign by religious political groups who urged people who are gay or lesbian to seek to change their sexual orientation through "reparative therapy."

The APA's statement stressed that "reparative therapy" is not benign and often has deleterious effects. The statement said "reparative therapy" practitioners often mislead patients and are motivated by personal prejudices. According to the resolution: The potential risks of "reparative therapy" are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient. Many patients who have undergone "reparative therapy" relate that they were inaccurately told that homosexuals are lonely, unhappy individuals who never achieve acceptance or satisfaction. The possibility that the person might achieve happiness and satisfying interpersonal relationships as a gay man or lesbian is not presented, nor are alternative approaches to dealing with the effects of societal stigmatization discussed...the APA opposed any psychiatric treatment, such as "reparative therapy" or "conversion therapy" which is based on the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based on a prior assumption that the patient should change his/her sexual orientation."