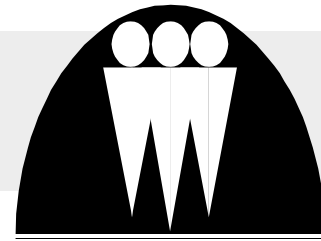


Reunion

Spring 2001

The Family Fellowship Newsletter



Issue 20

In Dedication of Allison Dunn

In loving memory of a dear friend and a great and fearless ally of the Gay Community.

Allison Anne Gates Dunn, principal of Logan High School, died peacefully at her home of breast cancer on Tuesday, March 27, 2001. Allison is the wife of Steve Dunn. Both have been active participants in the affairs of Family Fellowship and are the parents of five children.

Allison's greatest wish was that school be a safe place for all students to learn and grow. During her long period of illness, she missed only about a week, and that, she felt, was too much. She asked Steve to drive her to school where he carried her up the stairs to her office. Seated in her leadership chair in her office, her oxygen tank nearby, Allison got down to business. She tackled the usual crises, gave advice and smiled at whoever walked through the door. It would be for the last time.

Between the jump from teacher to principal lay another personal hurdle. Twenty years into her marriage, she learned that Steve, a former bishop, was gay. She found the book, "Loving Someone Gay" that Steve had been secretly reading. In the margins, he'd penciled in his thoughts he'd never shared with anyone. Allison's information gathering instincts led her to a Salt Lake City counselor and to a support group. "At one point," Steve related, "We thought it would be a good idea to divorce. But we couldn't. We wanted to continue to love each other... make sure our relationship was healthy, and we could model for our kids that no matter how difficult the issue, no matter how horrendous the problem,

we can attack it in a way that no one is hurt, and with grace and love."

Annette Haws, a close friend of Allison, said, "She and Steve taught us about tolerance and love. They modeled wonderful behavior. They demonstrated a love we don't typically associate with marriage. They were devoted. And in the end, I think their relationship was probably much closer than most married people. It was a beautiful thing to watch."

Allison was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1996. By February 2000, it had spread to her bones, liver and lungs. Haws said, "Despite the pain, she never complained, not in chemotherapy, in a bone marrow transplant, not even when the doctors had to drain her lungs over and over. She had a wry sense of humor. We even joked through the bone marrow transplant and told cancer jokes."

Allison's last day at school lasted just three hours. She left early to have her lungs drained. But that time, she didn't recover. The students were told that she had passed away. The faculty gathered together after school to grieve. Counselors offered crisis support. Students talked about their feelings and built a memorial of flowers and teddy bears at the foot of the school mascot, a statue of a grizzly bear. The flag was lowered to half-mast.

A memorial service was held in the school's auditorium on Saturday, March 31, 2001 with over one thousand people in attendance to honor the life of Allison, great wife, mother, friend and educator. 🐻

The only questions I ask myself are whether an action is honest and kind.



Allison Dunn Memorial Service Reflections

Gary M. Watts
Logan Senior High School
March 31, 2001

I would like to say at the outset that it is a distinct honor for me to be asked to speak at this memorial service. I don't think it is possible for me to convey to you the immense respect and love I have for this woman. I have given a great deal of thought to what I should say. The very fact that I have been asked to speak empowers me to some degree to speak frankly and I hope sensitively about Allison and her relationship with Steve and the children.

While reading Barbara Kingsolver's book entitled "The Poisonwood Bible" earlier this week, I came across a description of one of the characters that reminded me of Allison. "No matter how bad things might get, she eventually will find the grace to compose

herself." As everyone knows, several, totally unanticipated things happened to Allison, but she was always able to find the grace and compose herself.

Her life did not fully meet her expectations, was in some way less than she had imagined, but paradoxically, that less translated into more. Especially for those of us who observed the classy and resolute way she responded to adversity. She did not, would not hide. When she discovered Steve's homosexuality, she had this to say, "It was like discovering that you are suddenly living in France when all the while you thought you were living in Texas. Everything I knew about my world, my culture, my religion, my husband, and myself was up for grabs. I had to essentially reframe and redefine all the basics of my life."

She ultimately refused the isolation of the closet. It would have been out of character for her not to take her new reality head-on. Many women would, and many have, simply walked away, felt sorry for themselves and

returned hate and vindictiveness rather than unconditional love and a resolve to treat a husband struggling with his own sexual identity with dignity and respect and with true Christ-like love.

Allison practiced what she preached. It was her highest resolve as principal to make Logan High School a safe place for every student. That every student could be secure in the knowledge that they would always be treated kindly when they were in school. And why not? She lived her life that way and it is only natural for her to expect, yes even to demand, that her students follow her own example.

Allison, I so admire your courage and your intellect - your willingness to look a problem in the eye and then do everything in your power to overcome it. Your fight with breast cancer so epitomizes your indomitable spirit. Like so much in your life, it was not a battle

☐ *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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you wanted to wage.

"You've got to play with the cards you are dealt; we're not going to get another hand," you said and set about to learn everything you could about the disease and its treatment. You sought out the experts and tried to avail yourself of the best care possible. You risked everything in your attempt to beat this deplorable monster. You didn't shrink from the fight. You didn't walk away or give up. You did not try to hide the ravishes wreaked upon your body by chemotherapy. In fact, you actually looked quite angelic when your hair was gone. I thought of you as a modern day Joan of Arc.

Someone has said that the only way to take the sorrow out of death would be to take the love out of life. John Denver sang in one of his many songs about love: "And you know that love is everywhere, always safe, always true. And exactly where it comes from is where it's going to."

I loved Allison Dunn. We were soul mates in a sense. The immediate bonding that occurred for us was the simple fact that we both knew and loved someone who was gay. We knew intuitively that they were not being treated fairly. Allison was acutely aware that we could all do quite a bit better than we were doing in our understanding and treatment of those who differ from us.

Even though we both grew up in Logan, I was older and didn't know her until six years ago when we met at a Family Fellowship conference at the University of Utah. She and Steve talked publicly for the first time about Steve's homosexuality and the impact it had on their marriage and family at that conference. They were initially going to do their story anonymously to protect the family but just prior to the conference had made the decision to tell their story openly and honestly. At the conclusion of their presentation there was not a dry eye in the assembly.

The life of this woman and her husband provide us with an opportunity to examine ourselves – our biases, our prejudices, and, too often, our restricted vision. Oh, the folly of humanity! We lock ourselves in our own beliefs and our own paradigms and in the process, too often, abandon the very precepts we claim to cherish. But not Allison. In living her life she discovered a truth that I, too, have come to know. When you know and love someone who is gay your whole world changes.

You see gays and lesbians in a different light. They are no longer the "other." They are no longer foreign, strange and dangerous. They are your husband, your son and daughter, your brother or sister, your friend. They are not the one-dimensional demons painted by some in this society that simply do not understand. When you truly love someone you can't stand to see them hurt. You can't stand to see them misunderstood. Very few things are more painful than to see a loved one taunted, denigrated, misunderstood and disenfranchised. And it spills over to all injustices. When you become sensitized you see so many.

So you take a stand and fight and that's exactly what Allison did. "Not in my school," she said. "Not in my family. Not in my community." Oh, how I admired her tenacity. Perhaps that is one of the keys to understanding this extraordinary woman. Why her number one goal as a principal was to see that her school was a safe school. That no one under her tutelage was to be the subject of epithets or slurs.

She lived in a marriage for some 28 years to a man she loved and understood was a good man. Yes, he was gay. And yes, in many ways he had disappointed. Turned her life upside-down. Made it more difficult than she could have ever imagined. But somehow she found the grace to compose herself and in the process has set an example of unconditional Christ-like love that everyone in this world would do well to emulate. She had this to say about her experience. "The world has become infinitely complicated for



me in many ways but in other respects it has become extremely simple. Currently, the rules that govern my life are few. The only questions I ask myself are whether an action is honest and kind."

Now I would like to say something to Allison's children. Your mother's DNA is in you and will continue to flow through you and subsequent generations as far as the eye can see. Take care of her DNA. We need to preserve it. Heaven only knows we need more of it. Be proud of your heritage. You have been blessed with exceptional parents. Their story and your family are extraordinary. Your mother was something special — one of the truly great people to travel here.

Her premature death ushers in a new era. It is an era that must be faced together as a family. I'm confident you can succeed. Your dad needs you now, more than ever, and you need your dad. He is strong. He is a family man and will help bear your burdens. He loves you as no one else can and will do everything in his power to make your way smooth. Do everything you can to make his way smooth, as well. You have my love and respect.

You know, I think your mother pretty well had it figured out. Before we embark on any action, let us pause and ask ourselves as Allison did. Is it honest? Is it kind? When we are all able to do that, the world will surely be a better place. 🙏

A Couple's Story

Steve and Allison Dunn

Part Three

Allison We left the Midwest when Steve got a job teaching at a university out West. I hoped our move would be just what our relationship needed. But instead of helping, the problem became more exaggerated. I knew the things people were supposed to do to be attractive. I tried all of them. I bought nightgowns, arranged special evenings, and became the sexual initiator. His pained rejection became so humiliating that I finally gave up.

Steve About three years ago, while I was performing in a university production, I worked with an actor who was brought in from New York. I was surprised when his male partner came to watch him perform. That was the first time I knew my actor friend was gay. I asked if I could talk to him privately. He agreed and we went for a drive after a performance. I wanted to know how he reconciled his behavior with the church's stance, how he got along in society, how he felt about his life, what he knew about change, whether he had tried to change, and were there others like me out there in the world? My questions were endless. He invited me to New York to visit them so we could continue our conversation, and so he could introduce me to other men in similar situations.

One of the men I met, a physician who had been married and had children, sent me a book called "Loving Someone Gay." As I read the book I was amazed at how many of the author's descriptions of gay people paralleled my own feelings and experiences. I wrote comments in the margins of the book whenever I read something that hit particularly close to home. I was beginning to understand that I really was a gay man, and I was alarmed. I didn't realize it then, but this book was to be the thing that eventually saved my life.

In spite of all the new information I was gathering and the kind and good people I was meeting, I was overwhelmed by sadness, and I entered one of the darkest periods of my entire life. I was totally convinced that I should kill myself to spare my family the pain of living with such a worthless human being, to free Allison from having to live with a homosexual, and to ensure that none of my family or close friends would ever know about my sexual orientation.

In early January of 1993, I was assigned to do a three-day workshop out of the state. While I was packing to leave for the workshop I got out the book to take with me. I placed it on the bed and hurriedly finished packing my clothes. I quickly left the room when I heard the airport shuttle driver knock at my front door. After I had settled down and the van was well on its way, I performed a mental checklist and thought about the book. I

checked my bag, it wasn't there. I panicked, but by this time there was no turning back. I convinced myself that I had left the book in my closet and that everything would be okay.

Allison I remember the day that changed our lives in a very odd, black-and-white sort of way. I came home from school in a kind of fatigued haze. I had set a task for myself to accomplish some thing that could actually be seen as progress. It seems odd to me now that of all the things that needed to be done in the house, I would choose the one task of cleaning the spare bed. It had been piled with papers needing to be filed and small items to be dealt with.

I sorted and filed and wrote small notes. I cleared and fiddled with small scraps of my life for what I suppose was about an hour. Remaining on the bed was a book tossed carelessly on a corner of the bed. It was not my book. The title jumped out at me and I, without enough time or energy to approach another task that evening, picked it up. There are moments that change lives. It hardly seems fair that most of the truly life-altering moments storm at you and take you completely by surprise. This one washed over me and altered my entire world.

The title of the book was "Loving Someone Gay." I read a wide range of literature because of my professional training, and the title itself did not alert me to anything. As I leafed through the pages, I saw that Steve had made notes in the margin. I first read the notes and then the text passages and finally a bookmark, inscribed, a gift from a gay friend. But it was as though someone had sucked all the oxygen out of the room. I remember breaking out in a cold sweat and closing the book. I set it down and walked from the room.

My predictable response to a crisis is not usually a panic attack. This was one of the very few times in my life that I actually could not think. I probably wandered the house for two hours, always ending up in the room again to pick up and put down Steve's book. I remember standing with the book in my hands and suddenly having everything become ultra-focused. It all made sense. Steve was gay.

Steve Nearly every evening when I am gone conducting trainings, I check in with Allison via voice-mail to hear about her day and how the kids are doing. During this workshop I could tell from the strain in her voice that something was wrong at home, but she was not telling me anything. I immediately thought of the book and prayed that that was not the problem.

Allison I felt an absolute conviction that I must not disclose this to anyone. The last thing I wanted was to fall apart and involve anyone else. I have never felt as frightened and isolated as I did then. I had only let one person into the interior of my heart, and that was Steve. How could I take this information to someone else who might hurt him? The

onslaught of feelings would not stop. It was exhausting.

When Steve came home two days later, he walked in the door and knew that there was a serious problem. We got the children down and I went to bed. Steve walked into the room and turned to face the night stand where I had placed the book. I was lying on my side facing the wall, when I heard him inhale and I immediately turned to look at him. I will never forget as long as I live the look of complete despair on his face. He was absolutely still. Even his breathing had stopped. All I could think of was the pain inscribed on his face. This was my friend and companion, and the agony that emanated from him was palpable. During the two days prior to his coming home I had convinced myself that Steve was a total stranger to me. All it took was the picture of his pain to convince me that this was indeed the person I knew and loved. I had no idea what we were going to do, but I knew that I did not want to do this thing alone.

Steve For twenty years this was the very moment I feared most. I immediately decided there was nothing I could do but to respond honestly to anything she might ask. I spoke first, and I simply said, "It's true." She inhaled and started to cry, and so did I. Now I was terrified of her response. I was convinced that she would turn her back on me, and leave me isolated and alone. I knew I would not live if she hated me, so her reaction was crucial. I was surprised and unnerved by her gentle, kind, and concerned response.

I have told Allison many times that I am alive today because of her. She is my personal savior, because without her love and continued fidelity I would have killed myself. Occasionally we are able to laugh about our journey. Whenever she jokingly wants to threaten me to do something for her, she will remind me that I owe her my life. I willingly do what she asks because I know it is true.

Allison The next few weeks were torture. It was like discovering that you are suddenly living in France when all the while you had thought you were living in Texas. Everything I knew about my world, my culture, my religion, my husband, and myself was up for grabs. One of the most stressful things about this period was that I was very unsure what I thought or believed about almost everything. I had to essentially reframe and redefine all the basics of my life.

Steve I think I love Allison more now than I ever have. During the first year that Allison and I struggled with understanding and accepting the fact that I am a gay man. Once, while we were sitting in the car talking about our concerns, I mentioned to Allison that I wanted desperately for the feelings to go away. She made a remark then that serves as my guiding paradigm. She said, "Steve, we are going to deal with this the way it is. We are not going to be dealt another hand. God is not going to give us a new deck of cards." All my life I wanted another set of cards, but at that moment I knew she was right. Forty-four years of unsuccessful attempts at change should have taught me that.

To Be Continued.

An Invitation To Biology Teachers To Help Gay Teens

The most recent issue of *The American Biology Teacher* (Volume 63, pp. 154-162, 2001) contains an article by Professors Mike V. Smith and Mary Ann Drake of Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, entitled "Suicide and Homosexual Teens: What Can Biology Teachers Do To Help." Help is surely needed, as the recent suicide data are alarming. In 1998, in the US, 4003 youth aged 15 to 24 years took their own lives; suicide is the third leading cause of death in this age group. Gay teens account for about 40% of these deaths, and attempt suicide at a significantly higher rate than their heterosexual peers.

The authors next present a stark view of what it's like to be a gay, lesbian, or bisexual teenager. Twenty-eight percent drop out of school because of discomfort and fear. GLB youth are subject to "an epidemic of harassment and violence," both verbal and physical. The result for many of these people is depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and lack of self-esteem.

Following this introduction to the subject, Smith and Drake then address the "Nature or Nurture" issue relative to the causes of homosexuality. They briefly review the relevant biochemical, genetic, and psychological studies, and note the difficulty in evaluating reparative therapy programs which do not report their success rates. Suggesting that the moral issues surrounding homosexuality are complex, they draw this conclusion. "In our opinion therefore, the teacher's role must be to support gay teens, not try to change them or preach at them."

The article concludes with recommendations about what biology teachers can do to help.

1. Start with a personal inventory. Become informed, research the subject. Consider the importance of your acceptance for a potentially suicidal child.

2. Reexamine the atmosphere in your classroom. Provide a safe environment that permits open exchange, a diversity of views, and a non-judgmental respect for others. Make it clear that name-calling, abuse or cruelty is unacceptable. Be sensitive to the importance of language – partner instead of girlfriend/boyfriend, sexual orientation not preference. Avoid reference to "lifestyle."

3. Address sexual orientation in the biology curriculum. It may be considered as a part of the subject of behavioral genetics, or the nature of scientific inquiry and evidence. Homosexuals who might be cited as scientific role models include Leonardo da Vinci, Sir Francis Bacon, Alan Turing (developed first modern computer) and Margaret Mead.

4. The paper includes an excellent list of resources including online sites. 📖

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.

Applying Family Values:

A Conference for Families with Homosexual Members

June 8-9, 2001

Behavioral Science Auditorium, University of Utah, Salt Lake City
Registration fees: \$25

Friday, June 8th

7:00 p.m.

"How Does the Boy Scouts of America Policy on Gays Affect Our Family?"

Sundance Film Festival's award winning movie, "Scout's Honor" will be shown, followed by a discussion under the direction of David and Carlie Hardy featuring Tom Shepherd, film director; Steve Cozza and Dave Rice, co-founders of Scouting for all. Light buffet for all registrants.



Saturday, June 9th

8:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.

Continental breakfast for all registrants

8:30 - 9:45 a.m.

"We Have a Gay Child, Now What?"

When a child comes out, family disruptions inevitably occur. How do parents and other family members respond to this new reality? How do we get appropriate information? How do we keep our family together? Speakers/moderators: Rob and Kathryn Steffensen. Panel participants: Lynn and Shauna Westberg, Karl and Jane Braithwaite.

10:00 - 11:15 a.m.

"Are Homosexual Relationships a Threat to the Nuclear Family?"

Is there any validity to the perception that homosexuals are anti-family? Will sanctioning same-sex relationships undermine traditional family values? What is the real basis for the generalized opposition to same-sex marriage or civil unions? Speaker/moderator: Gary M. Watts, M.D. Panelists: Wayne and Sandra Schow, Robert and Lani Graves.

11:30 - 12:45 p.m.

"How Can We Decrease Homophobia in Our Family?"

Almost everyone has said something they regret. What are some of the things straight family members say and do that the gay family member perceives as ignorant and

insensitive? Conversely, are there some things gay family members do and say that are counter-productive to good family relationships? This workshop will explore ways for the family to travel a prudent course in loving and supporting their gay family member. Speaker/moderator: Lynette Malmstrom, LCSW. Panel participants: Bill and Marge Bradshaw, gay and/or Lesbian, sibling, son or daughter of gay couple.

12:45 - 2:45 p.m. Box Lunch

"Trembling Before G-D"

Screening of the Sundance Film Festival Movie. (Orthodox Jews do not use the word God in speaking or writing.)

3:00 - 4:15 p.m.

"How Do Families with Homosexual Members Maintain Their Spirituality?"

The revelation that a family member is gay may have a major impact on individual and family relationships with the church and spirituality. Is it possible to maintain such relationships? This workshop will explore these questions and expand on some of the themes highlighted in the "Trembling Before G-D" movie. Speaker/moderator: Tom Henderson. Panel participants: Mick Spencer, Deacon, Catholic Church, Geneva Peterson, Mac Madsen.

4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

"How Does Repairative Therapy Affect Marriage and Family Decisions?"

When an individual is attracted to the same sex and considers attempting to change sexual orientation, the decision makes ripples throughout the family. This session addresses these concerns by considering various situations: An 18 year old prospective missionary with same-sex attraction; a returned missionary still dealing with same-sex attraction; a young woman contemplating marriage to a young man who says he has same-sex attraction; a newly married couple with no children when one of them is dealing with same-sex attraction; a married couple with three young children but one of the spouses is same-sex attracted. Panelists and presenters: Marybeth Raynes, Marriage and Family Therapist, co-editor of *Peculiar People*; Ron Schow, Idaho State University, co-editor, *Peculiar People*; Lee Beckstead, M.S., Doctoral student in Counseling Psychology.

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