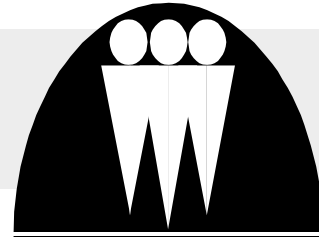


# Reunion

Fall 2001

The Family Fellowship Newsletter



Issue 21

## A Personal Perspective

Joe Dallin

Joe Dallin was invited by BYU Hawaii to be involved in a panel for a sociology class in which gay and lesbian issues were discussed.

Joe's panel was part of a four-hour presentation about homosexuality. It is part of the Sociology program at the school, a requirement for them to retain their accreditation. There were four panelists involved, ranging from a gay teenager to older gay activists. He was the only Mormon there. They each had three or four minutes to introduce themselves before opening the panel up for questions. Joe was last and his intro went something like this.

My name is Joe and I'm from Orem, Utah, the oldest of six kids from a very active Mormon family. My dad has been in a couple of bishoprics, and is currently a bishop. Growing up we were always very active in the Church. It was the most important thing in our lives.

I attended four years of seminary and graduated with a 4.0 GPA. I attended a year at Utah State University and took six institute classes that year. I served a two-year mission for the Church. When I returned, I went on the BYU-Jerusalem program followed by two years at BYU. But all through this I knew I was gay.

Starting in elementary school, I began to have crushes on other boys. But I never felt different; I just assumed that was how things were and that I would like girls, instead, when I got older.

When I hit puberty and I hadn't changed, I turned to God to "heal" me. I really threw myself into religion. I felt that if I did enough, that God would change me, and bless me with heterosexual desires. I used my homosexuality as a gauge of my righteousness. As long as I had these feelings, it meant God wasn't pleased with me and I had to do more.

By my senior year in high school, I was reading and studying scriptures for about two hours a day. This continued through my year at Utah State. No matter what I did, I was still gay.

I finally came to the conclusion that two to three hours a day dedicated to the Lord wasn't enough and I'd have to give Him more. I knew, however, I could not do that until I went on a mission. I went with this

perfect faith that I would come home as a straight man. In fact, I had a girl back home and we wrote each other every week and we planned on getting married when I got home. Just before getting home, however, I realized that I hadn't changed my feelings about other men. I was still gay. I felt like a failure. Even though I had done by best on my mission, it hadn't been enough. God hadn't changed me. I felt like it was my fault; that I hadn't done enough, or had done something wrong in the pre-existence and that God was simply disgusted with me. So I broke up with my

*I was overcome with the feeling that I had always recognized as the Spirit, and at that moment I knew that I was a person of worth, that God loved me.*



girlfriend and began to feel overwhelming depression. I even became suicidal. I literally believed that God wanted me to kill myself, to rid the earth of this evil, dirty creature.

Finally I came to the end of my rope. I wrote a suicide note, had it all planned out, and was ready to do it. One night though, I pleaded to God to give me just one reason not to go through with it. I was overcome with the feeling that I had always recognized as the Spirit, and at that moment I knew that I was a person of worth, that God loved me. I knew then that I was created as a gay person, and that God had already proclaimed his creations good. I knew that I was to fill the

measure of my creation as a gay man, and that I wasn't meant to live a miserable, solitary life, that it wasn't good for man to live alone, including me. I knew that happiness was the object and design of our existence, and that I was part of that plan as well.

From that point on, my life completely changed overnight. It was like the sun rose for me for the first time. A few months later, I found Affirmation, which is a gay and lesbian Mormon support group. A few months after that, I met my partner, Wade. He was, also, a returned missionary and was raised as a Mormon. We've been together for two and a half years. I finally understand all those love songs on the radio.

There are two points I'd like to make. One, homosexuality is not a choice. From about age 13 to 22, "changing" was my number one priority. I wanted to change and be able to fulfill all of the commandments I was taught, but it didn't happen. In fact, at a meeting at BYU a few months ago, there were some Church leaders that talked to campus bishops about homosexuality and they said that it isn't something that can just be "prayed and fasted away."

Then the second point I want to make is that homosexuality isn't just about sex. I am not with my partner just because we're chemically compatible. We have a connection that is psychological, emotional and spiritual. It is about love, and I love him with all my heart. I hope we will be together forever. I believe that we will. 🙏

## Ann Lander's Advice Column

Dear Ann Landers:

I recently learned that our 20-year-old daughter, a beautiful and talented college student, is currently in a lesbian relationship. I am heartbroken and shocked by this. If her father finds out, it will kill him.

I am hoping and praying that this relationship will not last and that she will straighten out and get married. I love my daughter, but if she is truly a lesbian, it will be hard for me to love her as I did before. Can you help me?

Ann's response:

If your daughter is a lesbian, be aware this is not something she chose. She was born to be attracted to members of her own sex. It's the way she is emotionally "wired." I urge you to accept her partner with grace and hope other family members will also. 🙏

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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### Steve and Allison Dunn

#### □ Conclusion

**Allison** I think that it is important to say that there was a period of time when I became very angry with Steve. I remember sitting in the car and having a conversation with him, when the cold reality hit me, that intimacy between us had not been for Steve what it had been for me. I suddenly felt used. I felt a huge sense of loss. All the years that I had desperately needed to be touched, loved, and comforted, Steve had to fantasize about men and had never really wanted me. I remember yelling at Steve and finally hitting him on the chest as hard as I could several times. The frightening thing was actually his response and not my fury; he sat perfectly still without a hint of resistance. Rather than anger, his face was filled with guilt. He later told me that it was a relief to be punished for all the hurt he knew he had inflicted.

It has been a very long and difficult two years. As soon as Steve began to recover from his depression, I began to slip into a deep depression. My whole life had been ripped out from under me. Of all the things in the world that I had been determined to do, making a wonderful and complete marriage was the most significant to me. It was gone. Steve needed someone else, someone that I could never be. He had nearly died trying to be what he was not. I spent several months battling the slide into depression, but I lost the fight. I went on medication and continued counseling. It was the most exhausting thing I have ever done and I would not wish it on anyone.

One of the many very difficult things that I had to deal with was the fact that I would probably be divorced. I had been determined that my children would never have that particular pain in their lives. And now here I was with divorce as a very real possibility.

**Steve** My firstborn daughter is a delightful budding young actress. During her senior year in high school she received several scholarships from various universities offering her money to study drama. One of her first choices was a liberal arts college. Because of her extreme interest in this school, I offered to drive her and a friend to let them visit the campus and check out the school, faculty, and students.

As I perused the predominately gay shops in the business district near the campus, I saw displayed in a window a T-shirt with an insightful message: "Dear Lord, Please protect us from your followers." I stopped immediately and reread the message. I remember saying out loud that whoever had designed the shirt was right on target. I wanted to buy the shirt, but I was not "out" to my daughter, so I decided it would be inappropriate. But I have not forgotten that poignant plea for understanding, acceptance, and an invitation to be a part of the fold, to be the one brought back to the ninety and nine.

I have thought many times how wonderful it would be for the world if the Mormon church could set an example of charity and understanding by taking the most Christian of approaches and making a worldwide pronouncement that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will no longer treat homosexuality as a grievous sin; rather, that they will view homosexuality as part of the human condition just like left-handedness, or diabetes, or skin coloring, or heterosexuality. I yearn for the time when the General Authorities of the church no longer instruct members in the cruel practice of separating gays from families and full participation in the church, when they no longer perpetuate bigotry, fear, and hatred of gays in the name of Christ, family values, and protecting the church.

**Allison** I have said many times that this experience has saved me from being smug about any aspect of my life. It has changed the way I look at everything. Christianity has a new meaning. I examine my culture in a way I never have before. Honesty and the value of truth as a basis for healthy relationships have become paramount. I feel strongly that we must be brave enough and kind enough to deal with people as they are. I look at my children in a different way. I say to them often now, "I will love you no matter who you are or what you do." I wish someone had said that to Steve.

**Steve** For a long time I hated the church, hated the General Authorities and their seemingly perfect lives, hated God for what He had allowed to happen. I was filled with rancor foreign to my nature, and I was distressed by it. I would probably still feel similar emotions if it weren't for Allison's example. Months after her discovery, Allison had continued to give me her unconditional love. I was astounded. I had been warned not to trust initial reactions, so I had approached our continuing relationship tentatively. But I was beginning to accept the fact that Allison truly loved me. Then I was struck by this thought, "I have, unintentionally, hurt Allison deeply and profoundly — yet she continues to love me. The church has, unintentionally, hurt me deeply and profoundly. How can I expect Allison to love and forgive me while I remain bitterly angry with the church? I want to be as benevolent as Allison; therefore, I must forgive the church and love those who have, unwittingly, been my enemies." I had been taught this charitable principle in Primary, but this was the first time in my life that I had experienced unconditional love. I immediately began a significant adjustment in my perspective.

**Allison** My relationship with the Church presented another huge emotional upheaval. Unknowingly, the kind and loving leaders that I had always trusted to guide and protect me, had in fact helped to create my pain. Steve had been advised before his mission that he should marry a nice girl and all his same-sex feelings would go away. "Just serve the

Lord,” he was told, “and He will fix it.” I felt as though I had been prescribed as a remedy, like aspirin for a headache. The prescription of marriage was wrong. I could not provide what Steve needed. His same-sex feelings never went away. No one had intended to hurt or harm us, but both of our lives were ripped apart by silent years of grief and self-hatred as a result of well-intentioned, inappropriate counsel. What I needed, Steve could never give to me. I needed to be held and comforted intimately, to know that I was more than a mother and a partner. Mother and partner had never been enough. I still wanted to be loved completely. I knew the church leaders would probably try to change Steve, which I no longer believe is possible. They would also probably advise us to continue as a married couple. Our journey along this uncharted path has been a huge crisis of our faith, and I continue to ask the Lord for help. The central principles of the gospel still ring true to me, but with regard to this issue, I pray the church leaders will stop perpetuating unnecessary pain.

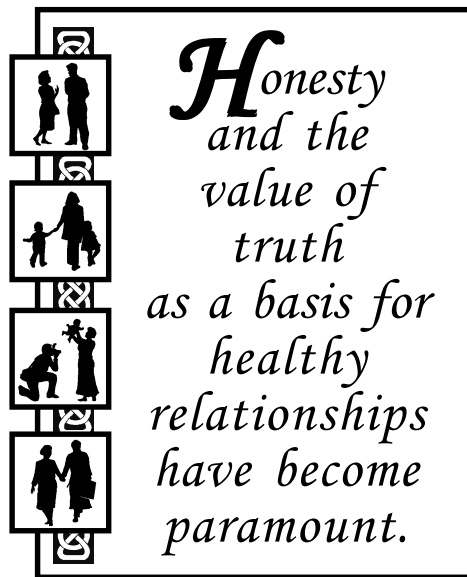
**Steve** My Stake President called Allison into his office in January and asked her about my sexual orientation. He had heard from an ecclesiastical leader that I was gay. She answered him honestly, and they talked for a long time. I called him later and scheduled a visit. I was nervous about meeting with him. For years we had worked in church callings that brought us together, but I had never talked with him. I was unsure of his perceptions of homosexuality and concerned that he might excommunicate me immediately. Happily, he has been kind and understanding. He wants to help me, Allison, and our family, and I am grateful for his charitable approach. But, like my first bishop twenty-eight years ago, this priesthood leader is also hoping to help me change. He is convinced that I have not demonstrated enough faith in Christ. He wants to give me a priesthood blessing because of his greater faith, because of his link to the Spirit, and because he can do for me what I seemed to have been unable to do: usher Christ into my life.

**Allison** One of my closest friends advised me that sex is such a small part of marriage, that I will regret giving up my relationship with Steve for something so inconsequential. People not faced with this challenge do not easily understand how much of life it touches. For heterosexual couples, sex and its cultural references easily weave into the fabric of society. I cannot stand to watch Steve’s head turn to see a good looking man, even though he subsequently looks away. The pain of knowing what attracts him is too intense. The pain of knowing I don’t attract him is worse. Conversations that center on traditional heterosexual marriages open up old wounds. Casual marital jokes, references to romantic evenings, and open displays of affection constantly remind me of what I can never have with Steve.

**Steve** When my Stake President asked me if I would like to change, my immediate thoughts were, “No, not this again. I can’t go back to living like that.” But I also did not want to close doors I had never opened. I was leery, and at the same time I wanted to be open-minded. I told him I would discuss his

offer with Allison. When I shared the president’s recommendation with Allison I also shared my reaction. I informed her that I thought that maybe I could stop my attraction for men. Allison’s reaction startled me. She said, “Steve, I don’t want you to just stop thinking about men, I want you to think about me. I want you to be sexually aroused by my body.” I was stunned. I hadn’t considered making this 180 degree turn. I had slipped back to my old thought pattern of saying “I can beat this! I can stop thinking about men!” But in no way did I consider that I would have to feel about women the way I feel about men.

I appreciate the Stake President’s faith and testimony. I admire his convictions. But I am frightened of the possible consequences of such an attempt to change my orientation. I



do not want to return to the daily grind of repression. I do not want to live in the catch-22 dilemma of being damned if I try, yet fail to change, and damned if I don’t try to change. I do not want to live under the scrutiny of a priesthood leader who regularly monitors the most intimate details of my life.

**Allison** I have lived for more than twenty years with this man. Steve is devout, kind, diligent, willing to serve, obedient, loving; in short, everything you could ask in a dedicated and faithful Latter-day Saint. If devotion and effort, if fasting and prayer, if dedicated time and paying tithing could have altered our lives, it would have happened. For me as a Latter-day Saint, one of the most difficult dilemmas is the culturally entrenched belief that sufficient faith precedes guaranteed miracles. If the miracle does not happen, then the blame rests on the shoulders of the petitioner. This is the ultimate catch-22. Live with the pain and live with your own unworthiness. I know this attitude is not doctrinally correct, but it is culturally entrenched.

Of the thousands of conversations we have had over the last two years, one is

especially relevant to this article. Steve asked me, “If you had known that I had a relationship with a man, would you have married me?” The answer is, no. I love Steve dearly. He is still my best friend and closest companion. But the dream of my heart was to be loved completely, and I am sure that if I had known that he was at all attracted to something I could never be, I would not have married him. What is truly tragic is that, because our culture has refused to deal with this issue in a positive, constructive way, there are thousands of marriages like ours in varying stages of grief and stress. And what is more significant, there are still hopeful young couples walking through the temple doors every day thinking that Lancelot has arrived, and that the kind and gentle friend they have married will be the magic answer to the pain.

**Steve** I am a Mormon. I believe the church belongs to me as much as to anyone. I have been a faithful member and I intend to stay faithful. I want to remain active in the church because of my testimony, because of my children, and because I believe church leaders need to interact and work with diversity. I am careful not to offend anyone by my atypical views, but at the same time I want to be a catalyst for change. I regularly attend church meetings. I love sitting with Allison watching our boys pass the Sacrament, answering questions in Sunday School, and chatting with neighbors and friends. I don’t go to the Temple any longer and I am unsure about my future Temple attendance. I will continue to work with my Stake President regarding matters of worthiness. The church is still an important part of my life.

Allison and I are not confident about what our future holds. The only thing we are sure of is that we love each other, that we want to keep our family safe and happy and cohesive. Whatever the outcome, I know I would not trade my family and my association with Allison for anything. I know I can handle anything with the love of Allison and my family.

**Allison** 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. Most people with same-sex attraction feel it from the time they are very young. They are not recruited, they do not choose, and they don’t change. If we understand that, we feel very differently about them. In our treatment of people with same-sex attraction, we have been neither honest nor kind. Prescribing young women or men as marriage-partner solutions to same-sex feelings has been neither honest nor kind. Speaking with hostility in our congregations about same-sex feelings is neither honest nor kind to our frightened children. We could do so much better. No one should have to walk the road that Steve and I have walked. 🙏

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

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



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

June 8-9, 2001

"Applying Family Values" was the name of the conference for families with homosexual members that was held this summer at the University of Utah and sponsored by Family Fellowship and co-sponsored by the Salt Lake City PFAG chapter and the Educational Psychology Department of the University of Utah.

The conference began on Friday June 8th with the showing of the Sundance Film Festival award winning film, "Scout's Honor." A discussion by the co-founders of Scouting for All then took place followed by a light buffet for the Conference participants.

The Conference on Saturday began with a continental breakfast with the following sessions proceeding throughout the day:

"We Have a Gay Child, Now What?"

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

"How Can We Decrease Homophobia in Our Family?"

Lunch break with box lunches served and the Sundance Film Festival movie entitled, "Trembling Before G-D" shown to the participants.

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

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

## Family Fellowship Forum

September 9, 2001

Terry O'Brien was invited to be the featured speaker at the quarterly Family Fellowship Forum in September. Terry currently resides in Provo and is a retired professor of Art History and Pre-Columbian Art at Cypress College, Cypress, California.

He is the author of a landmark article that first appeared in Dialogue in the fall of 1993 entitled "You are Not Alone: A Plea for Understanding the Homosexual Condition." Noted for his wry sense of humor, Terry shared his perspectives as an "out" gay man and active member of the Church.

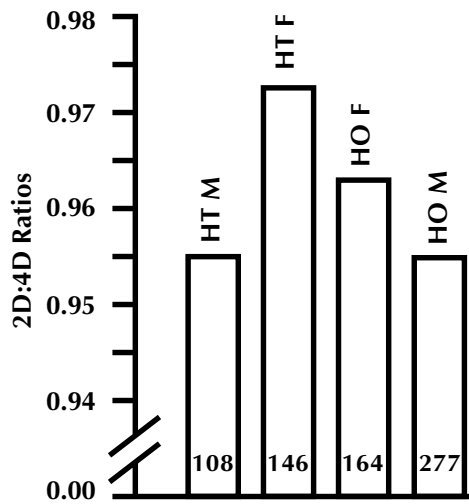
## headlines



### Study of Finger Length Suggests a Biological Basis for Homosexuality

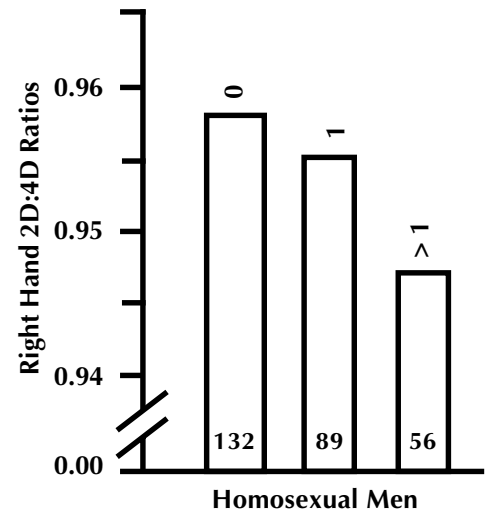
A recent report by investigators from the University of California at Berkeley shows that finger-length patterns vary with gender, sexual orientation and birth order (Nature, Vol. 404, p. 455, 2000). In women the index finger (second digit, 2D) is almost as long as the fourth digit (4D), but in men the index finger is often shorter than the fourth. This is true of both the left and the right hands. The 2D:4D ratio, then, distinguishes, women (high ratio) from men (Low ratio).

In this study the finger-length, gender, age, handedness, sexual orientation, and number of gender of children their mothers had carried



(Figure A)

before them were obtained from 720 adults in the San Francisco area. The 2D:4D ratio data for the right hand from this group of people is shown in the first figure (A). The number in each bar represents the number of individuals in that group. Note the high finger-length ratio of heterosexual women (HT F) relative to heterosexual men (HT M). Heterosexual and homosexual men (HT M and HO M) do not differ. The ratio for homosexual women (HO F), however, is lower (masculinized). This difference is statistically significant. Moreover, these finger-length



(Figure B)

patterns, like all somatic (non-gonadal) sex differences in humans appear to reflect the prenatal influence of androgenic steroid hormones (testosterone). The conclusion is that some homosexual women were exposed to greater levels of fetal androgens than heterosexual women.

What then of homosexual men? The male finger-length data were further subdivided into three categories: no older brothers, one older brother, more than one older brother. Figure B shows the result. The 2D:4D ratio for homosexual men with at least two older brothers is significantly reduced. In contrast the differences among the three groups in heterosexual men are not statistically significant. Having older sisters has no effect.

That men with more than one older brother are more likely to be homosexual has been established by other research (Annu. Rev. Sex. Res., 8, 27, 1997). This second result (Figure B) suggests that men, like women, who develop a homosexual orientation might be exposed to greater than normal levels of prenatal androgen. At present there is no biochemical explanation for a maternal "memory" of previous sons. 🏠

## Volunteers Who Wish to Help Family Fellowship

Several folks have contacted Family Fellowship wondering what they can do to help. We encourage you to submit your personal stories of your experiences with gay and lesbian family members for inclusion in upcoming issues of Reunion. As in any publication, articles may be edited for length, grammar and content. However, every attempt is made to preserve the originality of each article. Please send your articles to either Max and Janet Berryessa at [jberrryessa@qwest.net](mailto:jberrryessa@qwest.net) - fax to 801-373-2830 or Bill and Marge Bradshaw at [goverclan@aol.com](mailto:goverclan@aol.com) - address: 879 East 400 South, Orem, UT 84097.