

## How We Grew in Love and Tolerance

Joan Atkinson

It is not hard for me to remember what it was like to be intolerant of people who were different from what I thought I was. I see such people everywhere. I see it in their eyes when I make a stand for gay rights. I even see it in my own family.

When our son first came out to us as a gay person, he was sixteen years old. We, as his parents, did all the wrong things. We tried to get him "fixed up" through therapy. We went into the closet and locked the door. He was on the outside and we were on the inside. A family united in love and divided by intolerance.

I work at a Methodist Church Preschool and I have worked there for twenty-three years. It is odd for me to be a teacher and director of a church of another faith other than my own. Some time ago we closed down our school for the day. All the teaching staff drove out to Pasadena to attend an all-faith school conference which was held in a church. As we arrived at the conference, we had the opportunity to browse through the church as well as the school facility. The church had just been remodeled and it was a very large and beautiful facility. All in all there was about four-hundred childhood education teachers registered for the conference. While the other teachers of our group were taking a tour of the building, I went into the chapel to reserve our seats. While I was waiting, I met the keynote speaker and was glad to share a few minutes with her.

As the conference began, I noticed with great interest that the keynote speaker was not sitting on the stand and I could not see her anywhere. The minister gave us a warm welcome and offered the prayer. The audience sang a beautiful song followed by the conference coordinator who told us a little about the keynote speaker and her great teaching ability. After the introduction of Mimi Chenfield, the conference coordinator took her seat.

I watched the faces of the other teachers. I could see that they thought one of the richly dressed women who were sitting behind the pulpit would stand up. But none of them did. It was quiet as the audience waited for someone to address them. Then, just faintly, ever so faintly, we could hear a slight tinkling of a bell. Everyone turned to look at the back of the hall from where the sound was coming. Coming down the aisle was our keynote speaker. She wore no shoes. She wore brightly colored flowered pants and feathers in her long gray

braided hair. She was void of makeup but her face was radiant.

Since I had already met her, I was anxious to watch the other teachers faces as they saw her for the first time. Some were curious, some were shocked and they whispered to one another. As she came down the aisle she held a long brightly colored stick with feathers on one end. As she approached the stage, she said in a quiet voice that she was giving us a teaching blessing. As she took her place at the pulpit, magic began to happen. She held

us spellbound with her ragged dog puppet and her unusual tactics. She was wonderful and one by one she won over the audience. They stopped noticing her differences and were enchanted by her teaching methods.

Thinking back, this is what happened to me as I learned more about gays, lesbians, transgender and bisexual people. As I began to love my son for who he was, instead of what I thought he should be, my intolerance changed to tolerance. I am still learning and it is an every day process. 🐾

## You Are Not Alone

Terry J. O'Brien

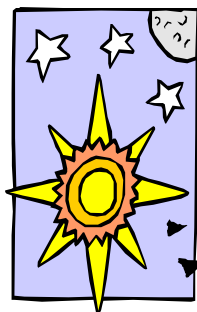
The awareness of my own homosexuality has caused the greatest pain in my life, but it has also been my greatest schoolmaster. Because I was such an absolutist and idealist Mormon, if I had not personally struggled with same-sex feelings, I would, like others, probably have pointed the uniformed finger of scorn and told the gay person to get help and straighten up. But life denied me the privilege of being smug. From age three I can recall a strong physical and emotional attraction for males, and for many years I anticipated a similar attraction to females – but in vain. Like so many others in my situation,

for the church and wanted no children. He had five. We grew up in the same family with the same parents and the same experience. Why wasn't he homosexual?

Believing my attraction for men was just a passing phase, I suppressed it for years and dated frequently in high school and at BYU. Serving in student government, I was able to date weekly many of the most popular girls on campus. Contrary to stereotypical advice that homosexuals lack positive experience with women, I liked them very much, socially and they liked me. I never sat home during a Preference Ball. But in spite of my apparent success with women, I seldom dated the same one often so as not to get too close and reveal that I could not respond romantically. No doubt they felt frustrated with me too, for one young woman said with sarcasm, "Dating you is like dating my big brother – I feel so safe."

I served a successful LDS mission and afterwards in a branch presidency in the army and also in a bishopric. I also taught seminary and Institute, dated often, and felt close to God. But, I was perplexed by my lack of romantic feelings for women. Spiritual leaders assured me that marriage would change all that. Following well-intentioned encouragement from friends and months of agonizing prayer, fasting, and soul-searching, I finally entered into a temple marriage to a wonderful woman. While marriage was thrilling, natural, and effortless for my newlywed friends, for me it was unfulfilling and frightening. I was terribly despondent over my inability to feel the role of a husband and to respond sexually, but I could not explain the reasons why. My wife

□ Continued on next page.



Perhaps God would not allow me to change that which he put within me for some wise purpose.

at no time do I recall making a conscious choice about my sexual orientation. Where would I have even learned of such an option? If I had a choice, it would have been, "No." Why would I deliberately choose something that would isolate me and inflict me with so much pain, confusion and feelings of rejection? For my life I only wanted to be an active Mormon with a wife and children. My brother had no use

## 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.*



### Board of Directors

#### CHAIR

MILDRED & GARY WATTS - PROVO: 801-374-1447

#### VICE CHAIRS

MARV & GENEVA PETERSON -  
FARMINGTON: 801-451-7955

#### SECRETARY

CLAIR & MARSHA NIELSON - UT

#### LEGAL ADVISOR

JEFF ORR

#### TREASURER

KEITH FROGLEY - SLC: 801-227-6720

#### BOARD MEMBERS

MAX & JANET BERRYESSA - UT  
STEVE DUNN - UT  
RON SCHOW - ID  
MIKE GREEN - UT

#### FORMER BOARD MEMBERS

WANDA & FRED KARFORD - ID FALLS: 208-523-3786  
KATHRYN STEFFENSEN - SLC: 801-485-1833  
MORGAN SMITH - UT

#### Advisory

DUANE & KAYE JEFFERY - UT  
GERRY JOHNSTON - UT  
LYNETTE MALMSTROM - UT  
MARYBETH RAYNES - UT  
WAYNE & SANDRA SCHOW - ID

#### Publications

JAY BELL - UT

#### Newsletter Staff

TYLER YATES - UT  
MAX & JANET BERRYESSA - UT  
BILL & MARGE BRADSHAW - UT  
CLAIRE MALMSTROM - UT

#### Website & Mailing Lists

KIRT BECK - AK  
ROGER CRANDY - AK

#### Regional Family Affiliates

JOAN & BILL ATKINSON - LOS ANGELES: 310-378-3938  
MAC AND DIANA NIELSEN - SAN DIEGO: 619-470-7184  
RENEE & RICHARD VAN WAGONER -  
NORTH OGDEN: 801-786-1322  
WENDY REYNOLDS - TWIN CITIES, MN: 612-315-4360  
ROBERT & LYNETTE GRAVES - WASHINGTON D.C./  
NORTHERN VIRGINIA: 703-222-6608

#### Additional Family Affiliates

WAYNE & ARLENE COOPER - ID  
JEANINE & DELOY NELSON - ID

and I prayed together, read scriptures, attended church, and sought advice from our bishop and from a General Authority. My wife was courageously cheerful and supportive, but with no real insight into the situation, she felt somehow responsible. Although it was not her fault, the marriage was never consummated and out of fairness to both of us, eventually ended. She has since remarried and has three children.

In despair I began to probe my feelings to discover why the marriage had failed. At first the problem was not a conscious desire to male companionship but a total lack of romantic or sexual feelings for women. I assumed it was the result of years of strictly following church teaching to avoid sexual thoughts and involvements. But as I looked more deeply and honestly, I recognized in myself exclusive homosexual feelings. That was devastating. I, in turn, denied them, fought them, and examined them. Faithful to advice from church leaders, I fasted weekly, prayed, read scriptures, held church callings, dated again, and received therapy from LDS Social Services twice a week for years. I was still naive about the homosexual condition because the Bishop's Handbook at that time directed that I should not read about my "problem," not discuss it, and that I should separate myself "from anyone who shared it."

In spite of abstinence, an intense desire to change my same-sex feelings, and unwavering faith that I could, the lonely and daily fight along with adverse therapy gradually devoided me not only of sexual feelings but of all feelings. I withdrew from most social contacts and was left with a deep, gnawing hurt that in spite of my years of devotion and service, I felt abandoned by God and the Church. I could not understand why romantic interests so natural for others were impossible for me. I was deprived of the goal of the eternal family I had always desired and been schooled in – and had lived to be worthy of. Fortunately, I was too fascinated by life to be suicidal.

At one point in despair from feeling rejected because of same-sex feelings and lack of progress to change them, in spite of overwhelming effort and sexual abstinence, I wrote an emotional plea to President Spencer W. Kimball, who wrote back that I should see my current bishop, "a wise and inspired man of God who will tell you what to do." I went to my bishop as advised and was counseled: "I really don't know what to tell you." In disbelief, I went to another bishop, who said, "If God knew how you felt, he would feel so bad." I replied, "If God doesn't know how I feel, we're all in trouble." I then went to a former bishop whose wisdom had often touched me, and he summarily dismissed my dilemma with, "I'm not your bishop anymore, I can't help you." I went away with a heavy heart, thinking, "I know you are not my bishop, but I had thought you were my friend." A similar disappointment waited with the stake president. There was no help where I had always believed there would be. Because of my deep faith and confidence in the Church, I suppressed emerging feelings

that in my time of greatest need there was no one to help.

In retrospect I am not bitter. I know that these men did the best they knew how. The problem was simply too complex and beyond their preparation for it. Could anyone really understand the anxieties of being homosexual who has not experienced them? From ecclesiastical encouragement, I had spent years nursing false hopes to repent of that which I could not change and to become that which I never could become.

Still, I have, over the years, met dozens of returned missionaries and others whose stories of frustration at sincerely trying to change their sexual nature are similar to my own. Is it any wonder that having struggled intensely for so many years without change, we are weary and unresponsive to the uniformed injunctions to "just repent"? Although I have spent the better part of my life trying in vain to become heterosexual, perhaps this searching and zealous effort was a necessary part of self acceptance. I am now content to know that had change been possible for me, I would have. Perhaps God would not allow me to change that which he put within me for some wise purpose.

My Mormon heritage is still highly treasured, and I will always be grateful for the growth and love I have experienced in the Church, and for the support of true friends and family who continue their support. I miss the weekly fellowship and "spiritual home" wish people who once needed me, but it is difficult to see my role there under current conditions. Still I do what I can and what I feel comfortable with: I still study and pray and find consolation in fine music, literature, the arts, and in the company of upbeat and enlightened people who value my support.

To state simply that I am homosexual is too limiting: I am many things. I am honest, I am responsible, I am creative, I like people, I am a son of God, I have a fulfilling profession, I have same-sex feelings. The feelings are not the galvanizing force in my life, but they are a part, one that has to be understood and dealt with in order to make the rest work. For those who choose it, including myself, celibacy is a viable option, but for others who prefer a permanent partner, I see nothing morally or socially wrong with responsible and committed same-sex pairing. I do, however, feel, along with most homosexuals I know, that promiscuous, self indulgent behavior, is irresponsible and unfulfilling.

Homosexual members are not asking for a license to sin, but rather for understanding and support while we work out a complex situation placed upon us for some unknown reason. With help, many LDS homosexuals have learned to accept themselves and have discovered, as many of us have, that being irreversibly homosexual is not, as some would have it, a cross to bear but a cross to wear. And we are learning to wear it with dignity and pride, knowing that in God's plan there is a place for us. 🙏

## 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.**

# A Personal Perspective

Roger Jackman

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America reads:

*"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed – that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."*

The Constitution of the United States of America, Amendment XIV, Section 1, passed by Congress June 13, 1866 and ratified July 9, 1868 reads:

*"All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."*

We have been deceived by our ideals of our government, by others and by ourselves. According to our Declaration of Independence and Constitution, we have been "endowed" with the power of freedom of expression, freedom from fear, and the freedom to worship and do as we please, as long as we do not impinge on the freedoms of others.

Sadly, the freedoms and equalities promised have not been given to us. We as a people have had to fight and struggle time and again for the rights promised to us for being members of this nation.

How many of you have had to struggle to gain your identity as an individual? To be accepted as an equal by your peers? How many of you have not had to endure abuse or bigotry due to sex, race or religious beliefs? How many have suffered because they were fat, small in size, wore glasses, have blond hair, had braces, been poor or just been a woman? And now as of September 11<sup>th</sup>, we can add to the mix, American or Caucasian.

Everyone at one time or another through

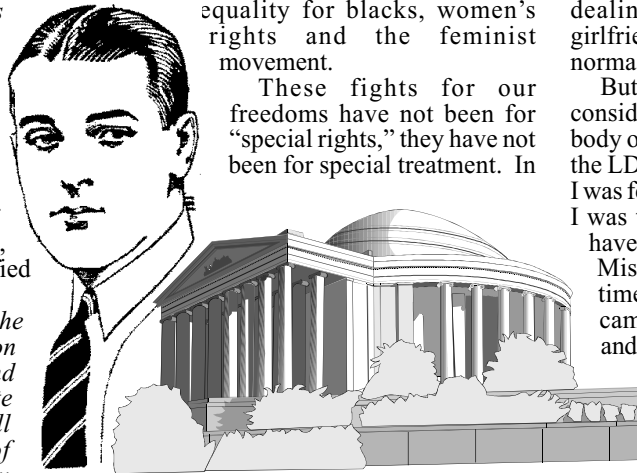
themselves or through their family experienced some form of racism or prejudice. Starting with the beginning of time to the present. Women have been repressed and considered as property rather than a person. The Holocaust, the crusades and most recently the Trade Center Attacks. Everyone has suffered from some type of racism or bigotry. No one is exempt.

The fight for equality still rages on. In the last century alone, we have seen uprisings such as women's rights, black equality, ethnic diversity, the feminist movement, Stonewall and gay rights. The fight to be equal and to be recognized as individuals is still going on today.

My name is Roger Jackman and I am gay. It is not a sickness, a phase or a fad. I fight. I bleed. I have suffered. I am human and I am a citizen of the United States of America.

Gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people have suffered and fought right along side you. They have fought in the wars of this country, walked along side in the equality for blacks, women's rights and the feminist movement.

These fights for our freedoms have not been for "special rights," they have not been for special treatment. In



this melting pot of a country, where people have flocked for centuries, the fight for equality which was stated in the Declaration of Independence of this country as being "self truths" and "unalienable rights." These are rights belonging to everyone of this country. But just like our fight for freedom from tyranny, we must fight to receive the justice that is granted to us by the Declaration and the Constitution.

Homosexuals, bisexuals and trans-gendered people have been around through all ages of history. Alexander the Great, Leonardo Da Vinci, Walt Whitman, Sappho a poet of Greek times, Lawrence of Arabia, Elton John, Ellen Degeneris. All are just examples of the people who have affected our lives and have played key roles in the forming of civilizations and cultures of the world.

Misunderstandings have been borne out of ignorance. The lack of understanding any culture separates us. To think that we are truly different from everyone else is a fallacy. The only true difference other than the sex of the partners is the right to marry.

My father was killed in Vietnam. Two weeks later I was born. I was raised in an LDS and military environment. My uncle was the

father figure for me. I spent many years in my youth with him and my aunt at different military bases.

We moved to Logan while I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I was small and was tormented and teased by my schoolmates for no other apparent reason. Many of them called me "fag" but the term meant nothing to me. I had many girlfriends during this time.

At fifteen, my mother moved us to New York where I became the minority because I was LDS and teased about it. However, that was the only thing I was teased about. I was accepted in the school as myself and it was the first year that I learned that I was human and worth something. That year I tried out for football and excelled in school for the first time.

Unfortunately, that did not last. We moved back to Utah the following year and the teasing and tormenting started where it left off. During the year I was talking with a friend and he leaned over to me and kissed me. For three days I struggled with what I was feeling. Something that to me felt so right. Not like my girlfriend's kiss which was more like kissing my sister. I stuffed my feelings and clung to my girlfriend. I avoided people that I had been dealing with, after all, this was my first girlfriend since grade school. I wanted to be normal and be a good boy.

But the feelings persisted. At one time I considered having an exorcism done to rid my body of this evil demon. I immersed myself in the LDS doctrines and tried to overcome what I was feeling by religious thoughts and feelings. I was the best little Mormon boy you would have known. I served a full mission in the Mississippi Jackson Mission. During this time, feelings for a member in Louisiana came to the surface. I spent days praying and crying to overcome these feelings. I had

myself moved to a different part of the mission to be away from the person and the feelings. I came home and realized it was time to do something about how I was feeling.

I knew I couldn't do it in Utah so I moved to Denver. I almost got married, then came out the following February.

This was in 1990. That April I ended up coming out to my mother. On telling my mother my first boyfriend dumped me. I was all alone. Crying on the phone I told my sister, who already knew. She soon became my rock and my support. To this day, my sister is still my rock. The one I can truly talk to. My nephews support me strongly, after all, I do spoil them. However, it is not all peaches for me. Some of my cousins support me. I have one cousin that acts as though I don't exist. My aunt and grandmother pretend that I am straight, and my mother will only talk to me if there is something she needs to have done. The hardest thing to hear is when I take her somewhere and people tell her "is this your son? I didn't know you had a son. I know all about your daughter, but I didn't know you had a son." This is a tough sound to bear.

I am a survivor of physical and mental abuse by my mother.

However, when it comes to my sexuality, I am not a victim of my circumstance, I am not a survivor because I have accepted myself. I am gay and I am a human being. 🍌

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.

Family Fellowship Forum  
March, 2002



*I come to realize more and more, as my experience broadens, the vast influence and power that a small minority may yield in this world, in politics, in religion, in social activities, everywhere you go. A small group, united in purpose, with definite goals, may greatly influence the great majorities.*

Spencer W. Kimball  
Sacrifices for a Just Cause  
Creates Character



## Studies on the Children of Same-Sex Parents

In a recent publication [(How) Does Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?, American Sociological Review, 66, 159-183 (2001)] Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz of the University of Southern California report their analysis of 21 separate studies of the children raised by lesbian parents. Published between 1981 and 1998, this body of research had come to a remarkably consistent conclusion: that there were no demonstrable differences between heterosexual and homosexual parents in parenting styles, or the emotional adjustment or sexual orientation of their children. In taking a second look at these research reports, Stacey and Biblarz are particularly concerned about the methodological procedures employed and the particular political perspective of the researchers. Because the issue of same-sex parenting is so controversial, they looked for the possibility that some real, instructive differences might have been overlooked or under valued by the authors of the papers. Consider the question, "What is in the best interest of the children?" At this level of social concern this report finds that the conclusion of "no differences" is confirmed: for same-sex parents all the studies to date



find no measurable effect on the quality of parent-child relationships, nor on children's mental health (self-esteem and psychological well-being), their social adjustment, or their cognitive functioning. (There are not yet reports of long-term achievements in education, occupation, or income). The possibility also exists, for example, that lesbian parents exhibit some uniquely positive parental skills. On other issues, Stacey and Biblarz leave open a possible impact on children's sexual preferences and behaviors. They conclude that additional research is warranted as hints of differences have not pursued because of their political sensitivity.

Of particular interest to members of Family Fellowship is that Stacey and Biblarz take to task the work on this subject of Lynn D Wardle of the BYU Law School who is sharply critical of sociological research that favors gay rights. They document that the studies that Wardle uses to bolster his case, whose themes include the view that "homosexuality is a learned pathology," have come under severe criticism by professionals in the field because of poor scholarship, controversial assumptions and biased definitions. 🏠

For more information about Family Fellowship write to:  
1763 North 1500 East  
Provo, UT 84604  
Phone: (801) 374-1447  
<http://ldsfamilyfellowship.org>