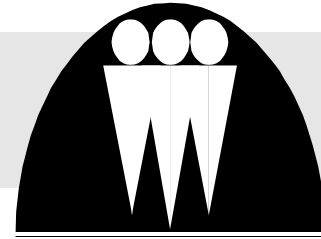


Reunion

Winter 2005

The Family Fellowship Newsletter



Issue 27

Resurrection

Mario J. Aranda

I knew from age four that I was homosexual though I lacked the vocabulary to give it a name. I knew that I was not like other boys. But then, I was a minority in so many other ways that in my child's mind they must have all become jumbled. I am a Sephardic Jew via Mexico and Spain with one Chinese grandfather. I was a fourth-generation Mormon in a Catholic country, a person of color in a Caucasian outpost, a colony established by the Mormons in Mexico, and a gay child in a straight world.

In the Mormon Church, I absorbed early on that there was a God that loves some more than others, whites more than persons of color, men more than women. What does a child do with such information so freely dispensed? That was the easy part. Even as a child I knew that I was gay and that this was not of my own choosing. I also knew that this was a secret that I could never reveal even to those who loved me most. It was like living in a "witness protection" program but without the protection part, knowing that at anytime I could betray myself and some awful thing would happen. At puberty, I experienced a nervous breakdown; huge patches of my hair fell out. My parents and our kind family doctor called it a "vitamin deficiency" while I wept myself to sleep every night wishing my own death. I had not only not been born white, I was also gay. God loves only white and straight people. I was taught by my beloved Church which also promised that if I were only righteous enough, in time, God would not only make me white, he would also make me straight. I longed for a safe place to be.

I learned to become an over-achiever so that I could be above reproach and somehow induce God to love me. I also soon learned to fragment myself into many pieces keeping parts of me buried deep for safekeeping. I served a mission, married in the LDS Temple, and gradually developed a public "persona" that I thought would make me more acceptable to the Church I believed in and to the world. If I were only good enough, my Father would change me to become like the people that He loved. I was unaware how profoundly these lies were hurting me. Like the people of Jonestown, I had drunk of the purple Kool-Aid. I had learned to hate parts of me – wished my own death.

A kind Heaven knew that we could almost be erased, that we would suffer amnesia, and

so planted within each of us a homing device. Deep inside each of us dwells a wise and patient being who already knows the way Home. And if we nurture an inner life independent of the larger tribe and its expectations, then that sweet inner self begins to unfold like a divine seed responding to sun and rain – a child of God yearning to be born. And so it was with me. At age 48 and a lifetime of being clinically depressed, I began remembering myself, connecting those pieces that I had been taught to repudiate. I began therapy and my coming out process – my resurrection. My coming out sexually is part of a much larger "coming out." To come out sexually – exclusively – would have meant that I would remain in a state of dissociation and pain. For me, coming out had to be total – sexual, emotional, spiritual, and physical. It was not just my sexuality that was closeted, but also my capacity for joy. It meant shattering all my illusions of who I thought I was – my profession, my emotions, my theology, my relationships, and my sexuality. This was a painful unescorted journey that from the outside probably looked a lot like madness. Mystics call it "the dark night of the soul." In the end, I found that the dark night of the soul was simply the chrysalis forming. I was birthing a new self, or, perhaps, just remembering who I was.

For a time, I continued to play the game of "Guess What I Am Thinking?" the one where you have to figure out how you have offended God, make amends, then hope that He will eke out some love. I felt that I had done everything right. Like the laboratory rat, I was conditioned to hit all the right levers but now the Divine Experimenter was randomizing things, alternating food pellets with terrible electrical shocks. I had lost my business, my marriage had dissolved, and my younger children had moved West with their mother. Nothing seemed to work. The harder I tried, the less I understood. Old answers no longer seemed to work. I was exhausted.

I was living alone in our old family home. It was a gray, unforgiving winter in Chicago. I

was tired of crying. In surrender, I one day angrily said, "I have done all I know how to do. I will not play these games with you!" I curled up in bed, pulled the covers over my head, and prepared to die. Night turned into day and day was as good as night. I just lay in a dark depression.

Finally, one early morning I regained awareness as if from a deep sleep and realized I felt safe and warm. I was being cradled in the arms of a Great Love. I became nervous, asking impatiently, "What do you want of me now?"

"Call your friend Don and have him teach you of my love," said a tender Voice as clear as any I have ever heard with my physical ears. Don had been a Mormon bishop but long ago had left the Church. When I met him, I was a Stake Patriarch; he, an excommunicated Mormon, a former millionaire now content to be a custodian in a local rest home.

I got up and waited impatiently for daylight and called Don. He came over, took one look and said, "You look like hell! Let me just hold you." So he held me and I wept. He asked, "How did you get into such a mess?"

I answered in a rush of pain. He responded, "Now buddy, that aint God. Where did you learn of such a God?" And I began to remember each

sad place where I had learned to hate myself. Don reminded, "That aint God." Then for the next ten hours or so, he patiently, guided me through a re-imagining of my God. In the end, I felt peaceful and loved.

Don invited, "Why don't you kneel down beside me and talk to God like you used to when you were a kid." I buried my face in his lap and prayed as if for the

first time. The ancient hurt had left and a quiet joy replaced it. It was nighttime again when Don left. Outside the snow was returning and for the first time I could hear the Song of the Universe and my heart was at peace.

Soon thereafter, I resigned from my job at Tribune Company, closed down the family home, gave away most of my belongings to my children, kept mostly my books and my music, and moved West for the difficult journey of re-inventing myself, triggering my own Resurrection.

Re-formation is what I do fulltime now. I have learned that the kindest thing Jesus can do is to not fix what isn't broken, that you can't correlate biology. Kind Heavenly Parents together made of us an exuberant creation in many colors, in many shapes, and in many sexual expression, each divine and pronounced

□ *Continued on 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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□ Continued from page 1.

us Good! It is our own fears that teach us otherwise. I have learned above all that we are all loved with a love that melts all fear. We come from Love and Love is what we are. All else is fear speaking.

These days I live in a place of joy most of the time. When I don't, it is because I have replaced joy with one of my old illusions. So it has become essential that I hone those practices that give me life when I feel myself less than alive. For me that means good nutrition, quiet meditation, exercise, and nourishing human interactions. Above all, it means going in again and again to that place that Jesus called "the Kingdom of God within you" where my own God-seed lives.

My children have been extraordinarily generous to me during this difficult passage. They assure me that we have all been made richer by the experience. It is as if my coming out gives them pieces of the puzzle they needed to complete the pattern of their own lives. One

of my daughters recently lovingly touched my body that has changed substantially, and said delightedly, "I can't believe you're the same father I had in the 80's!" And, I am not. 🙏

Mario J. Aranda, 63, is a writer and therapist living in Marin County, California. He most recently was Director of Clinical Services for a large family services organization, where he counseled families affected by domestic violence. He has been an educator, a civic leader, an entrepreneur, and a newspaper publisher. He was born into the LDS church as a fourth generation Mormon. He has served in bishoprics, as a High Councilor, a Temple Sealer, and at age 35 he was ordained a Stake Patriarch in the Church. He is the father of seven children and the grandfather of 9 year-old Wyldon. With his life partner, Greg Hinson, he is helping to raise Greg's two teen-age daughters. Together Greg and Mario own and manage a company that makes olive oil. This is his story.

Amendment 3

Debbie Goodman

On November 2nd the citizens of Utah voted on a constitutional revision known as Amendment 3. Since this amendment was approved by a majority of Utah voters the state constitution will be modified to restrict the right of marriage to heterosexual couples. I was hoping that Utah voters would consider a historical comparison before deciding how they would vote on this issue.

My family experienced a constitutional law change in a different nation and era, one that invalidated the marriage of my paternal grandparents, who had been legally married for over a decade and were raising two young children at the time. Their right to marry was revoked by the Nuremberg Laws, implemented in Germany in 1935.

My grandmother, a Lutheran, and grandfather Walter, a Jew, met during their school years in the town of Halle, Germany. Walter was wounded as a soldier fighting in World War I and they were married in 1919. Their children were born in 1924 and 1928.

Walter and Gertrude integrated a combination of Jewish and Lutheran customs into their family life and worried more about poverty than about anti-Semitism.

With the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, mixed marriages between "Aryan" and Jewish Germans were described as Rassenschande (race defilement) and the right of marriage was denied to those couples.

Ordinary people like my grandparents, people committed to the obligations and responsibilities of marriage and parenthood, had the rights and benefits of marriage revoked by their own government. Those already married were subject to imprisonment and hard labor for remaining married, although Walter was not arrested until Kristallnacht in 1938.

It is important to understand both the

similarities and differences between the Nuremberg Laws of yesterday and the proposed marriage-definition amendments of today.

The Nuremberg Laws divested Walter and Gertrude of other rights of citizenship, such as raising the German flag, holding certain jobs and sending their children to high school. My grandparents lost all previous political rights and their status was redefined from "citizen" to "state subject." The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor led to the formation of a complicated classification system defining various degrees of Jewishness.

Utah's Amendment 3 aims to withhold only one right of citizenship from homosexual people, and it attempts to do so by legally redefining marriage as a concept limited to heterosexual couples. This is the distinction between the political approaches of past and present.

The similarity is that both laws constitute a misuse of governmental process in response to pressure from political activists. According to historical accounts, the Nuremberg Laws were drafted as a result of Nazi Party activists demanding that government officials take action to align legal policy with anti-Jewish sentiments.

Nearly 70 years later, Utah legislators responded to pressure from constitutional activists demanding that the Utah Constitution be modified to align with anti-homosexual sentiments. Given my family history, I was saddened and disturbed to see this cycle repeated. I was hoping my fellow citizens would consider their decision with an open mind and heart. My grandparents' neighbors did not have the courage or conviction to choose the path of justice and tolerance. I prayed that my neighbors would choose differently. 🙏

Debbie Goodman is the daughter of Holocaust survivors and resides in Bountiful. She works for a local non-profit Wildlife conservation organization.

The Safe Space

For members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October was a time for spiritual reflection, when members of the worldwide church's leadership address the entire body of the church with what Mormons feel is up-to-the-minute guidance from their divinely inspired prophet. For Greenbelt, Maryland resident Bridget Foster, an active Mormon, this fall was not only a time to look for guidance but to do her part to express love for those who may be silently suffering as the battle rages against Mormon gays.

Foster has a personal knowledge of the difficulties that arise from trying to reconcile being a devout Christian and gay. She says, "Early one morning in college, I got a call from my best friend. He had been admitted suddenly to a mental institution overnight and needed me to bring him his toothbrush and some clothes. He had tried to commit suicide. I knew he had been struggling increasingly with something, but I had no idea what it was. I rushed to the hospital and found him there, his eyes full of tears, terror, and trauma. My friend told me he was gay and wanted to die."

As she watched the battle over homosexuality in general and specifically gay marriage rage, Foster began to see members of her own church suffer in silence. Whether homosexual or heterosexual, she and other friends began to see that too often the feelings of those struggling with being Mormon and gay were being trampled on, with disastrous results. The news of attempted and successful suicides by faithful gay Mormons spurred her to found a group that would send a message to Mormon gays: "That you are loved. Please don't leave. Don't ever feel that you must take your life, or that you don't belong."

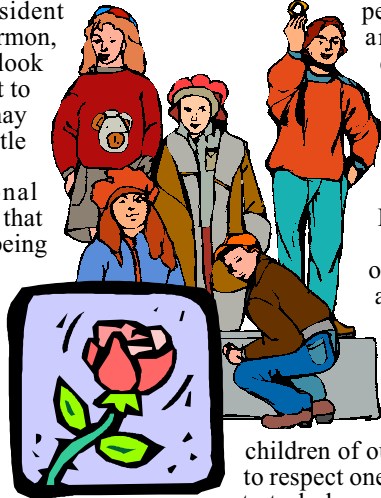
Pink flowers purchased online and over the telephone were delivered to the LDS Church's headquarters in downtown Salt Lake City, Utah during the Fall LDS Conference weekend. However, the campaign has been very clear that its goal is not to be controversial or antagonistic to the church; those who purchase the pink flowers wish only to send a message of love and encouragement to Mormon gays who may be suffering silently.

Foster chose pink to represent acceptance because of the pink triangles Hitler forced homosexuals to wear in Nazi Germany after recalling a speech given by former LDS Relief Society president and current Deseret Book's head, Sherry Dew, which compared lack of action against homosexuals to lack of action against the rise of Hitler.

Although the text of the Safe Space Declaration (full text below), which was delivered along with the flowers, differs greatly from official church positions on homosexuality and gay marriage, Foster has repeatedly made

it clear that the Safe Space campaign was not meant as an attack on the LDS Church.

"The Safe Space campaign was designed to be peaceful and affirming rather than confrontational," said Foster. "We hope that sending a large number of pink flowers will send the message that LDS people are not homophobic, and that many of us are committed to fostering the Church as a diverse place that recognizes the worth of individuals, even if they are gay or lesbian."



Dear General Authorities:
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stands as a restoration of the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We read in the scriptures of the teaching and actions of our Savior, who taught us that, as children of our Heavenly Father, we are to respect one another, to shun none, and to truly love our neighbors as ourselves.

We believe that every child of God shares a divine potential, and as Latter-day Saints, we welcome all, regardless of their circumstances.

We are aware that many suffer in the Church because of their sexual orientation. One good bishop wrote recently about his gay son's attempted suicide, and this family is not alone. Members who find that their gender identity or attractions do not fall within standardized expectations are too often marginalized, frightened, and taught that their feelings are an aberration that must be "corrected." Many try desperately to change their nature through Church-sanctioned measures, and when those fail, they feel that the only options left are to leave the Church or to commit suicide. The number of suicides and attempted suicides within the Church over the issue of sexuality indicates the need for a new approach.

We have learned through experience, as well as through scientific research, that homosexuality is not simply a changeable lifestyle choice, but a deeply ingrained element of a person's created nature. We do not believe that God intends for some of his children to be treated differently than others, especially in the most significant matters of the heart.

We believe in standing for principles of truth and righteousness, and as such, we proclaim the following: We stand up for our knowledge that God makes no mistakes in the creation of his children. He taught us in the scriptures that each one of us has a unique and cherished place in the Kingdom of God. All humans are endowed with both the desire and the right to form lasting nurturing relationships built on

honesty and love.

We stand for a Church that is a beacon of hope for all people, a Church that opens its doors to all as a "safe space," a tolerant and embracing place. We are committed to fostering the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a society where a homosexual member's options are not limited to eternal silence, repression, excommunication or suicide.

We stand for the principle that love is not a sin. We believe that the focus on sexual orientation obscures the real underlying issues of sexual sin, which are founded on lust, greed, and sexual exploitation, found among both heterosexuals and homosexuals everywhere.


We stand for the institution of the family as the embodiment of love and commitment. The presence of a father, mother, and children living together is not a guarantee of family success. The presence of true love and commitment within a family is a much better indicator. We believe that all families, regardless of the gender of those involved, should receive wholehearted sanction for our Church in establishing and nurturing eternal bonds.

The color pink has been embraced worldwide as a symbol of "Safe Space," a reminder of the prejudices and torture of the past, and a commitment to creating safe spaces for all of God's children to progress together as equals. We believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints represents the highest of the ideals of the Enlightenment as a society based firmly on mutual respect, tolerance, and equality. The Church we believe in embodies the safest of all spaces, built firmly on the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We believe the prophet Nephi when he spoke from the dust: "Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay: but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price. Behold, hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance. Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden." (2 Nephi 26: 25-28).

As faithful citizens of the Lord's kingdom, we recognize that Church leaders are directed by inspiration and revelation, and that the Church's canon of scripture remains open. We ask and pray that there will come a time soon when all Latter-day Saints may live honestly and openly as full participants in the blessings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

With love and respect,

The Safe Space Coalition, 

Comprised of members and friends of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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

A Saddened Mother's Letter to Her Church

*Detroit Free Press, MI, October 14, 2004
By Susan Ager, Free Press Columnist*

Near midnight, as her husband slept, lifelong Catholic Joanne Polisano sat down at the computer in her home office in Wixom and pounded out a letter to her pastor.

She began: "Perhaps in some small way I can understand what a mother must have felt like, 2,000 years ago, when a group of people of her own religion decided to persecute her son."

Joanne is 67 years old, a former Sunday school teacher and a conservative Republican. She never misses weekend mass.

But her youngest child, 38 years old, is a lesbian and finally happy after years of self-doubt as she struggled to desire a man. Now she shares a home with a woman she has loved for 5 years. They talk about bearing a child.

And Joanne is angry, hurt and ashamed that her church is working so hard to support Proposal 2, which would etch into Michigan's constitution a ban against gay marriage, civil union and equal rights.

Joanne's daughter and her partner already have left the Catholic Church. Joanne is ready to, despite years of loyalty. "How can I support a church that would discriminate against my child?" she asked me. "Maybe I should give my money to the Triangle Foundation" – a metro Detroit gay advocacy group – "someplace that would help my child instead of hurt her."

Joanne wrote her letter the day after she read that Michigan's bishops sent letters to more than 800 parishes urging priests to sermonize in support of the proposal.

Despite the hour, the letter "just flowed out of me," she said. "I hardly had to change a word." She woke up her husband and read it to him. He called it excellent. In the morning, she called her daughter, who cried to hear her mother's convictions and love.

Then Joanne hit "send" and e-mailed it to her pastor, the Rev. John Budde of Holy Family Catholic Church in Novi, where she and her husband have been members for 15 years. That night, she went to mass to give to her pastor a paper copy of the letter – just six paragraphs – including photos of her daughter and the woman she loves.

Budde is in Rome. But the letter he'll see when he returns says that although Joanne's daughter isn't perfect like Jesus, she, too, is perceived as different. "Many feel threatened by her. Not enough to kill her, but enough to make sure that she is set apart from the rest of society. Enough to make sure that she cannot fully participate in the advantages that 'they,' the normal people, fully avail themselves of."

Although a state law already prohibits same-gender marriage, it continues, the church feels compelled to change the constitution to make sure gays and lesbians

"will stop trying to live the same kind of lives we live."

"Let's make sure they not only can't marry," it says, "but they also can't obtain any type of civil union. Let's stop them from collecting benefits from their partner's insurance. Let's make sure they have no say in their partner's health decisions even if they've lived together for 20 years.

"Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, I look at my beautiful adult child ... and I ask my church, 'What has she ever done or would she ever do to make you (like the Jews of 2,000 years ago) feel so threatened by her and others like her?'"

Joanne can find no answer to her question. She has no hope her letter will make a difference. But she couldn't stay silent, not this time.

Prick of the Ballot

Salt Lake Tribune

I was born and raised a Utah Mormon. In adulthood, through years of soul searching, study and meditation, I ceased to believe in the doctrines of the church, but not in its goodness or the goodness of its people. I thought I was prepared for the passage of Amendment 3. I was wrong.

Even with my gut clenched and ready, the punch knocked the air out of me. I'm not gay. I'm the big sister of someone who is. I grew up looking after my baby brother, protecting him from harm. But how do I protect him from the anonymous and diminishing prick of the ballot?

How do I walk among you now, my neighbors, my friends and my family? How do I greet you at my mailbox, visit with you at the water cooler and sit across from you at the Thanksgiving dinner table with the wounds you delivered throbbing and unseen by the double vision that seeks to separate sin from sinner when all I see is little brother, big



Be a spendthrift in love. Love is the one treasure that multiplies by division; is the one gift that grows bigger the more you take from it. It is the one business in which it pays to be an absolute spendthrift. Give it away, splash it all over, empty your pockets, shake the basket, turn the glass upside down and tomorrow you will have more than ever.

Anonymous

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

sister, family - my family, crying from the hate you did not perhaps intend, but which we nevertheless experience so profoundly?

Please, I want to understand how your family benefits from my family's pain.

Jackie Anderson, Price

Family Fellowship Forums

June 27 and August 29, 2004

Family Fellowship Forums are usually held on the last Sunday of each month in which there are five Sundays. However, the fifth Sunday in May fell on the Memorial weekend and it seemed advisable to postpone the meeting until the last Sunday in June where it was held in the auditorium of the Utah Valley Regional Medical Center.

That meeting on June 27th featured a video entitled Marriage Hopes and Realities in which Russ Gorrington described the many years of his married life as a gay husband. Following the video Russ and his two daughters responded to questions asked by members of the audience.

On August 29th the Forum was held in the Salt Lake City Library auditorium and the program featured a pro and con discussion of the proposed Utah State Constitutional amendment. The two participants of the discussion were Lynn Wardle, JD who spoke in favor of the amendment while Jane Marquardt, JD spoke in opposition to the amendment.

The next forum will be held on January 30, 2005. Further information on the time and location of the forum will be announced soon, along with the forum topic.