

C Newsletter

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Editorial ▽

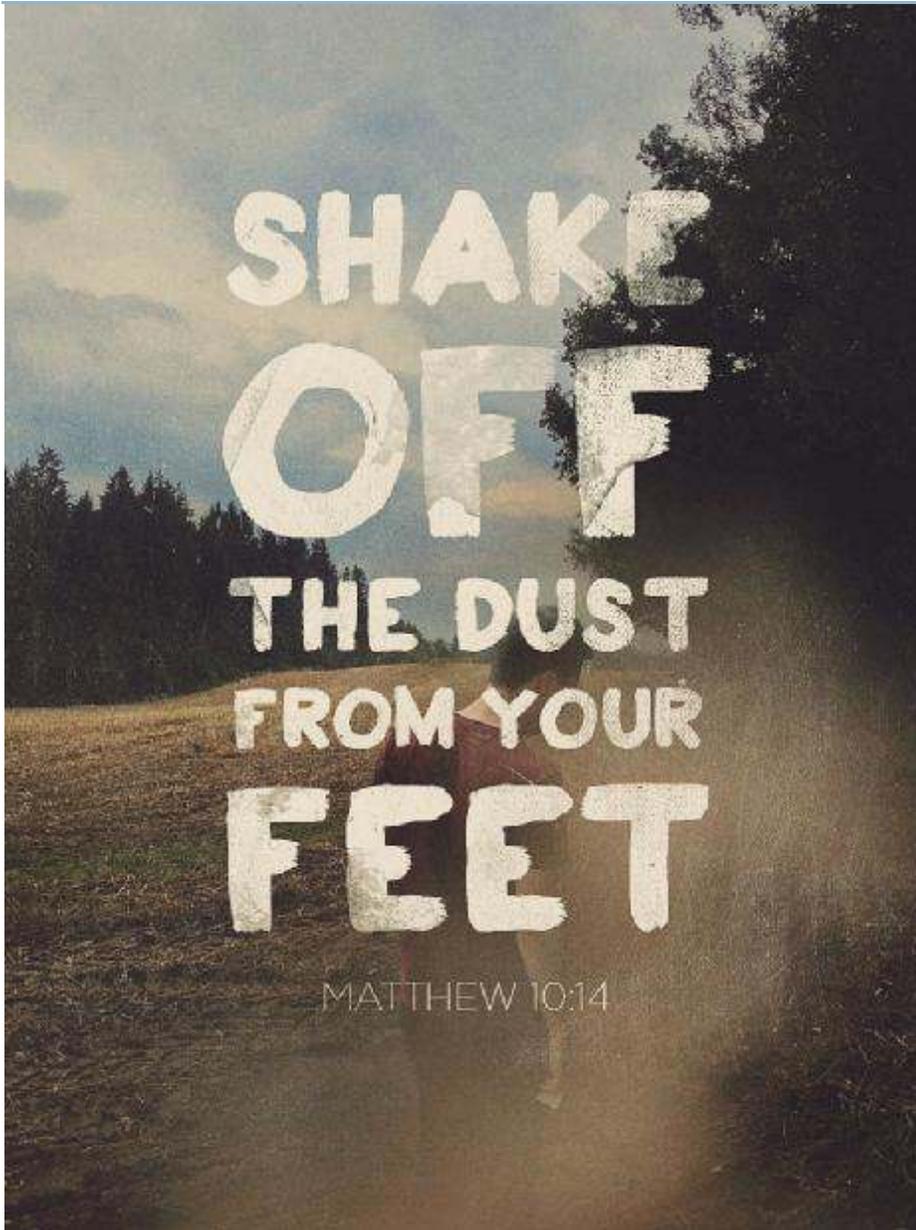


I want to let you know that I have decided to resign as editor of the *Connection*. This will be my last issue. Being part of our newsletter for 13 years is a gift. As I type, I am remembering some of the five o'clock Virginia mornings when I was communicating with Dave Coltheart in Australia about an article, with Jacquie Hegarty in San Francisco about proof-reading, and with Ruud Kieboom in the Netherlands about layout work. It felt like having my arms wrapped around the world. I have enjoyed getting to know many of you through your stories, Thanksgiving responses, photographs, and letters to the editor. I won't forget you. I have learned so much from the team with whom I have worked that the lessons would fill a book— that I probably won't write. Thank you, Jacquie, Carrol, Floyd, Yolanda, Jefferson, and Ruud. You rock. It seems appropriate that this issue has an article about spirituality from one of our members, two stories about the journeys of Kinship members, and an article about how we develop our identity. I hope you enjoy them. As always, I especially hope that you will take good care of yourselves—for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine

A holiday gives one a chance to look backward and forward, to reset oneself by an inner compass.

- May Sarton



By Andrew Dykstra

Do the words of our title sound like something Jesus said? Yes, of course. I have heard people approvingly quote this phrase and then say, “Yes, that’s right! If they reject you, shake the dust off your feet!” Their tone left me wondering if the speakers thought Jesus intended an action reflective of shaking our fist at someone, thus escalating the likelihood of violence. I would like us to consider whether, far from being words of provocation, Jesus intended them as a non-violent response, the first step in the process of healing.

Here are the words of Jesus in context: “Calling the twelve to him, He began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. These were his instructions: ‘Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.’ They went out and preached that people should repent” (Mark 6:7-12).

If any place did not welcome them, they were urged to leave the area and *then* shake the dust off their feet. If Jesus had intended shaking the dust as a provocation, wouldn't it have made more sense to do it *before* leaving the area?

I find it interesting that Jesus gave His disciples supernatural powers (“authority over impure spirits”) and, at the same time, advised them to *go out of their way to be vulnerable*. They were to travel with very few possessions—most shockingly to me, without money. Jesus sent them to do a mission completely dependent upon the hospitality of others. We might say that Jesus sent His disciples to preach and heal without any of the advantages of privilege; they were to have no more possessions than the poorest person they encountered.

Jesus seemed to urge the willingness to relinquish whatever privilege we may have for the sake of His kingdom. “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. Whoever wants to save their life must lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it’” (Matthew 16:24-25). In a world with many kinds of inequality, Christ's personal response was to relinquish privilege, preferring poverty. Jesus was, in fact, homeless. (Matthew 8:20)

I have wondered what Jesus had in mind when He sent His disciples traveling without money. Where would they lodge? I can only imagine that they were

invited to stay at the home of someone who was convicted by their teaching and healing. Soon after arrival, their hosts would arrange for servants to wash their guests' feet, rinsing away dust accumulated while traveling in sandals on dusty roads. In that culture, people dined while reclining beside low tables so their feet were not hidden under the table but were visible to all. Foot washing made guests feel not only clean and refreshed but also reassuringly presentable. If a picture could be conceived to express the idea that people had rejected missionary endeavors, it might be an image of dusty and unwashed feet.



What do dusty feet represent in our experience? In the aftermath of rejection, it is important that we assess our environment. If it has become toxic, we may decide it is healthier to take time out. If the level of toxicity seems unlikely to change, we may decide to remove ourselves permanently. Like Jesus, we may find that it is time to “move to another village,” but before we make any moves, we should take the time to acknowledge and understand the extent of our wounds, our unwashed feet. It is with God in mind that we are to shake the dust off our feet “as a testimony against them” trusting God to hear us. We leave the relational injury where it occurred and trust that God will make all things right, using Heaven’s values. God can be entrusted with that responsibility. (Romans 12:19) We may let it go. We need to have a more far-reaching priority.

Matthew's account of Jesus' commission to His disciples included a significant detail. "Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town" (Matthew 10:15). He was alluding to a familiar story from Genesis 19. While Lot received strangers in his home, offered them food, shelter, and protection, the other men of Sodom threatened Lot's guests with gang rape. Their actions were an extreme example of the general attitudes of the population toward the vulnerable. According to Ezekiel, it was this attitude that led to the destruction of the cities of the plain. "Now *this* was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49).

Why did Jesus speak about the Day of Judgment? Because that day will demonstrate the priorities of heaven. "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite You in or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for Me'" (Matthew 25:37-40). This attitude, not revenge, is our responsibility.

Jesus rebuked a tendency toward violence in His own disciples. "As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him because He was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then He and his disciples went to another village" (Luke 9:51-55). Jesus refused violence, even under provocation. His disciples were not called to judge or punish. In fact, as part of His last lesson before the crucifixion, Jesus used a powerful object lesson.

“It was just before the Passover festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power and that He had come from God and was returning to God. He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him” (John 13:1-5).

Jesus was fully aware that Judas would betray Him. How did Jesus respond? Faced with betrayal, Jesus relinquished all privilege, behaved like a servant, and kneeled down to wash the feet of His disciples—even *those of His betrayer*.



Another detail of this story touched me.

Some translations say Jesus stood up to wash their feet *during* the meal. The New King James Version says that Jesus did it *after* the meal. Either way, the text seems to imply that, contrary to all cultural norms and expectations, His disciples had begun to dine reclining on couches around low tables with dusty, still unwashed feet. John was present at this event and wrote about it. His focus was on Jesus’ act to, and in the presence of, the betrayer. Luke was not present that evening, but he interviewed eyewitnesses and reported on it. (Luke 1:1-4)

If Luke 22 speaks of the same event, and I strongly believe that it does, then it was a very tense evening. “...A dispute arose among them as to which among them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table?’”

“I am among you as One who serves. You are those who have followed Me most closely. I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on Me so that you may eat and drink at my table in My kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22: 24-30). In order to do that, you must have My motives and My priorities. This room was borrowed for the occasion. I am not surprised there was no mention of servants to wash their feet. Given the rivalries, I am not surprised no one of the twelve volunteered to wash anyone’s feet. Jesus wanted to get their attention; He wanted them to remember this lesson. *Jesus waited for the most startling moment* to do what they had neglected to do. The God of angel armies relinquished all privilege. The Ruler of the universe washed the feet of the petty, the jealous, the denier, and the betrayer. Jesus acted out heaven’s priorities.

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors...” (Verse 25) I think this verse could be read as a satire of people who believe their wielding of power is beneficial to others.

After what must have seemed a very awkward, embarrassing half hour for the disciples, “When He had finished washing their feet, He put on his clothes and returned to His place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ He asked them. ‘You call me “Teacher” and “Lord,” and rightly so, for that is what I am.

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them'" (John 13:12-17).

Jesus exactly reflects the character of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus reflected exactly what God the Father values. This is more than a non-violent response. To relinquish privilege is to reflect how God is and acts. God is love. (1 John 4:8)

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8).

Jesus used a Passover footwashing to teach us that we are to serve friends *and*, those who reject us, those who deny and betray us and those who choose to be our enemies. It is not an easy calling. We are to stand with the oppressed and somehow still be Heaven's object lesson to the oppressor. We are to have "the bigger picture" of God and our place in time on such a large canvas that we transcend fear and anger and jealousy and remember "That which distinguishes the people of God from worldlings is their sympathy for others, their tenderness, their meekness and lowliness of heart: they reveal they wear Christ's yoke and are recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit." — Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, December 6, 1900

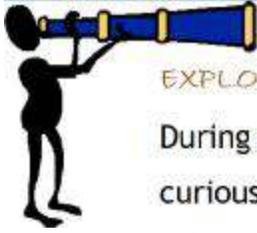
"The last message to this world is a message of God's love, a revelation of His character of love." —Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 415 ▾



By Michele O'Mara, PhD

CURIOSITY

A distraction develops. Sometimes this occurs in childhood, during puberty, young adulthood, or even after a heterosexual marriage. This can be repressed, denied, or otherwise delayed, or perhaps right on time, whenever that is. This stage is marked by awareness and an increased focus on one's attractions and feelings. Sometimes it's a feeling of difference; sometimes it is a new sensation, awareness, distraction, or other experience that piques one's interest.



EXPLORATION

During this period of active exploration, a person moves from simply being curious, to actively gathering info from his or her environment, and seeking out information and connections that relate to being gay.



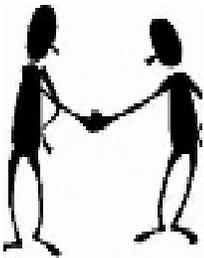
THE UNDOING

From the beginning, we are all conditioned to believe we are heterosexual; this is the “norm.” When evidence begins to accumulate that heterosexuality does not fit perfectly, disclaiming heterosexuality is often an easier next step than claiming bisexuality or same-sex attractions.



CLARIFICATION

Clarification usually occurs once a person has had a defining experience. This can be a physical experience, an emotional experience, or a combination of the two. Sometimes a person can fall in love (whether required or not), or become consumed by a new attraction that serves as confirmation of his or her sexual identity.



INTERNAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is the stage of sexual identity development when a person decides, yes, I am attracted to at least one person of the same gender. This acceptance may involve telling close friends or family, dating, or committing to a new relationship(s); or it may simply involve a personal shift into a new way of seeing oneself.



BRIDGING

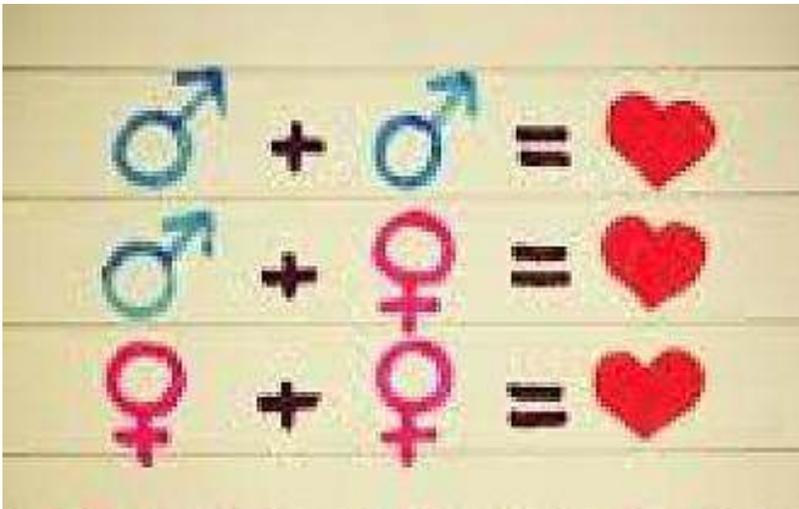
Once a person has accepted his or her attraction to at least one person of the same gender, the next step in sexual identity development is to integrate this identity with rest of life (work, family, friends, etc.). Some people bridge their identity with the rest of their lives entirely; others are selective about with whom they will share this new information.

LOSS OF FILTER

Once a person has accepted his or her sexual orientation and integrated their professional, personal, and family lives, there is a gradual lessening of censorship about one's sexual orientation. Eventually, life is viewed as life. It's not a gay life, or a lesbian life, or a bisexual life; it's just a life, without funneling first through a "gay" or "bisexual" or "pansexual," etc. lens.

REASSESSMENT

Some people experience an intermittent reassessment of their sexual orientation and feelings of same-sex attractions. Sexuality is being seen as more fluid, less stable than it was once thought, and people are not as inclined to cling tightly to one specific sexual orientation as much as they are inclined to cling to the truth of who they are and how they feel, whatever that may be.



Another way to look at the development is through the model Vivienne Cass developed.

It was 1979 and I was 13 when the beautiful new girl in school, with long brown hair and green eyes, approached the locker next to mine. Obviously struggling to satisfy the lock she was trying to open, she turned to me and said, "Hi." She told me her name and said, "I'm new here." Out of the blue, my entire body flooded with what felt like a million butterflies all trying to get out at once. It was at that moment that I knew there was something very, very different about me.

Ironically, that same year psychologist Vivienne Cass unveiled a six-stage model of sexual identity development for gays and lesbians which would prove to be very handy information for a budding young lesbian like myself. Sadly, however, her research was not on my 8th-grade reading list and I was left to figure all of this out by myself.

This six-stage model by Cass describes a progression of phases that gay men and women go through as they “come out.” It has been my observation that many people never get past stage four. How about you?

Here are the stages. See what you think.



Stage 1: IDENTITY CONFUSION

“Am I gay?” This is where it all begins...with the wondering. Confusion and a general lack of clarity are the most common experiences during this stage. This is a pre-coming out stage and it’s unlikely that you share your feelings with anyone. You are faced with four options: deny, reject, accept, or do more research. If you choose to “accept,” please advance to Stage 3. If you choose to “deny” this, skip your turn and stay here until you change your mind. If you choose to “reject,” head on back to heterosexuality. Those choosing “more research,” progress to Stage 2!

Stage 2: IDENTITY COMPARISON

“Yes, it’s possible I could be gay.” This is the “one of these is not like the others” stage (from Sesame Street). This can be a very lonely, scary place—to not relate to your heterosexual peers, and to not have a network of gays and lesbians in place to normalize what you are feeling. During this stage, you’ll find yourself noticing what fits for you and what doesn’t, as it relates to your sexual orientation. There is a lot of fear, denial, and hope that this is just a passing phase. Once you begin to connect with, or learn about, other gays and lesbians you slowly move into Stage 3.

Stage 3: IDENTITY TOLERANCE

“I’m pretty sure I’m gay.” The isolation of feeling different from your heterosexual peers tends to motivate you to get out (or get online) and meet other gays and lesbians. During this stage, you are gaining clarity about your gay sexual orientation, but you are not too happy about it. You continue to censor and hide your feelings from most people while seeking connections with “safe” (other gays and lesbians) people with whom you can relate.

Stage 4: IDENTITY ACCEPTANCE

“Yep, I’m gay alright!” As you begin to find your place among other gays and lesbians, you develop greater comfort in your skin and you find more comfort spending time around others like yourself. As a result, you start to distance yourself from a heterosexual identity, while often trying to maintain the appearance to those around you that everything is the same. This is a complicated place to be and is often riddled with fear, sadness, and even depression because of the feeling of living in between two worlds. There is a lot of anxiety about what it would mean to step out fully into an openly gay identity. The stress of managing dual identities (passing as heterosexual in some environments, and not others) becomes stressful and overwhelming.

Stage 5: IDENTITY PRIDE

“I am gay and I’m proud of it.” Responses in this stage can range from feelings of anger toward your perceived oppressor (heterosexuals), to greater comfort with being out in all areas of your life, without apology. This stage brings greater confidence about who you are; and while you continue to prefer the company of your gay and lesbian peers, you put less energy into censoring your life from others.



Stage 6: IDENTITY SYNTHESIS.

“Being gay is just one important aspect of who I am.” This final stage, for those who continue to take the necessary risks to be true to themselves, brings the gay or lesbian person full-circle. You can now function as if sexual orientation is not a central variable in life. Here you have integrated your sexual orientation with the rest of your life, you are able to make decisions, interact socially, and function in life without doing so through a filter of your sexual orientation. Your life is no longer about dealing with, concealing, censoring, or advocating for the right to be gay—it is about living, loving, and being with *all* of who you are.

So where do you fall in these stages? ▾

The Identity of Nadine

Religion has always played an important role in the life of Nadine van Parys. She was raised as an unbeliever but for the last six years has visited and then was baptized into the Adventist Church in Brugge, Belgium. “That felt like coming home,” Nadine says. “I cannot imagine life without God, without religion, anymore.”

By Lydia Lijkendijk

Source: This is the translation of an interview that appeared in *Contact*, the three-monthly magazine of ESDA, an organization for Bible study within the Adventist Church in Belgium and The Netherlands.

—Translation by Ruud Kieboom



Nadine is 50 and lives in the town of Brugge with her three cats, named Mazeltov, Noah, and Jona. She is incapacitated by chronic nerve pain in her right arm and needs to rest a lot. Nevertheless, she tries to do voluntary work for two and a half days a week, takes Bible classes, and is active in the church as a Sabbath school teacher.

Nadine said:

My choice to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church four years ago was a very conscious one. I wanted to connect with the Lord and to show my belief to the people around me. At that time, I was married to a woman. I have always been open about my orientation to the congregation. I understand that I do not fit in God's original plan for mankind as in Genesis 1:28. That said, I know that I am also a child of God and that God takes me as I am (see 1 Peter 2:17: Show proper respect to everyone).

I have had in-depth conversations with the local pastor. I told him how I didn't understand, as a twelve-year-old girl, why all my girlfriends ecstatically talked about a certain singer or beautiful boy. I didn't understand what they experienced and felt I didn't belong to the group. I belonged nowhere. What could I know about homosexuality at that age? I even didn't know the word "lesbian." I felt very lonely at that time. I had no identity. This was awful for me. When I was 17 I watched a broadcast on Dutch television about young people and homosexuality. The puzzle pieces of my life fell into place. I was somebody.

The congregation of Brugge finally accepted my wish to be baptized. I will always be grateful to them. I came home. My identity has become more whole. While I am much the same person I was before I was baptized, I do study the Bible more. Because I am a Sabbath school teacher, I study deeply and am enriched by what I learn. I think my divorce happened partially because my ex-wife is not a believer.

Because I wasn't raised in a religious environment, I have many friends and acquaintances outside the church. The members of my family are not religious and do not always comprehend how important faith is to me. When they heard that I wanted to be baptized, they had many questions. How could I be a lesbian and choose to follow God when homosexuality is still a hot issue in the church? Friends even asked me, "What if the church does not respond positively to your wish to be baptized? Do you still want to go to that church?" I answered that I go to the church for God in the first place, not for the people. From the Bible, I have learned that God is a God of love, that we are all created in His image, and that includes me. I know that God won't let me down.

I identify with the story of Noah and have a strong bond with the statement in Genesis 9:14: "Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds." Whenever I see a rainbow, it is as if God tells me: "Whatever happens, whatever goes wrong, I won't let you down; you may start again." And I do identify myself with Jesus, of course. Whenever I have to make difficult decisions or find myself in difficult circumstances, I try to imagine how Jesus would want me to deal with the situation.

The archbishop of San Salvador, Mgr. Romero, who was killed in 1980, is a great example for my life, as is Frère Roger Schutz, the founder of the Christian Ecumenical Convent of Taizé in France. From him, I learned how important it is to give attention to people who stand at the edges of the society, to the poor and to minority groups, to which I also belong as a lesbian. I want to stress the importance of identity and be limited by it. Identity consists of many parts. My being a lesbian has shaped my identity. But that also goes for the fact that I love to drink coffee, love bike riding, love cats, am fascinated by the Bible, and love to go to church. These are all parts that form my identity. ▽

Journey (part XI)

By Jerry McKay



When I left Japan in 1976, I never thought I would be back except, possibly, at some point far in the future. I don't remember anything about the return trip except landing in Tokyo. This time, I had no anxiety about living in the land of emperors and atomic bombs. Everything foreign that had concerned me the first time, now reminded me of a place I loved.



1978 was the year of the horse according to the Chinese zodiac, so it was featured everywhere. Remnants of New Year's celebrations still hung in the streets and on private entranceways. Gifts left by visitors could be seen at shrines and temples, and there was still time for me to sample New Year's goodies—many of which were made of or with *mochi*—a sticky paste from pounded rice prepared and served in every imaginable way.

There were other aspects to arriving in January that I had forgotten. The air is clear in winter, making it possible to see the summit of Mount Fuji from the roof of the Adventist hospital. If you timed it right, you might see the silhouette of that sacred mountain as the sun set behind it. Winters are mild by Canadian standards. Minus five degrees centigrade is a cold night in Tokyo. Japanese homes typically have no central heating. The rooms that are heated when occupied are not heated when vacant. The not-so-uncommon result was seeing my breath when I entered a room and occasionally finding a thin layer of ice in the toilet bowl in the morning.



One of my fondest winter memories is of the yakimo man. *Yakimo* is Japanese for roasted sweet potato. At the time, men roamed the narrow streets pulling carts carrying wood burning stoves. From those carts, the yakimo man sold baked yams and roasted chestnuts. You knew he was in the area because a pre-recorded message cried out from a loudspeaker at his approach. The rather mournful song of—*yaaaaa-kiii-mooooo*—would draw people from their homes. The smell of wood smoke and baked yams against the cold night air added to this special treat.

The most significant difference was my accommodations. The male teachers now lived within walking distance of the school rather than the 40-minute commute by train. I had enjoyed the commute, but the now 20-minute walk through suburban Tokyo was pleasant in any season, day or night. During those walks, I grew to admire the symmetry and clean lines of Japanese architecture. I was drawn to the older homes with their weathered wooden exterior, old and patched paper screen doors, and worn tatami floors. I often wished I could have exchanged our nearer home for one of those old houses. There was just something inviting and comforting about them.

In most respects, my life throughout 1978 was a mirror image of my first year in Japan. That did not mean it was routine. Every day was filled with fascination and meaning. Seeing friends whom I thought I might never see again was the real joy. As before, I spent endless hours teaching English and trying to get as many students as possible into my Bible study classes. Seeing the impact of my efforts in both areas from 1975 held great personal reward.



I was pleased to find former students succeeding in English. One middle-aged man who spoke little English when we met in 1975 had moved through the 10 levels the school offered. He beamed when he told me that because of his hard work his company was sending him to Europe and the United States on business. His delight heightened my interest in teaching as a profession.



Some friends were still studying the Bible and wanted to pick up where we had left off. I was as eager as they were to do so. A few had been studying with the local pastor and while I was there decided to be baptized. During that summer's English camp, a student-become-friend was baptized. Everyone gathered on the shore of Lake Inawashiro to watch. It was early evening and the setting sun had turned the sky and lake a soft pink. When the language school director raised his hand over my friend and said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," I felt connected to the two millennia of Christian history in a way I had never before.

There were two highlights of the year. The first included sharing my love of Japan with my mother. She is an introvert, so she often pushed herself well beyond her comfort level just to experience the world that I had often written home about. Students and friends treated her like royalty, and she was frequently complimented on having raised "such a wonderful son!" Like a trooper, she even went to a public bath with the friend who graciously hosted her during her stay.



Donna was the other highlight. Much to my envy, she had returned to Japan the previous fall for a visit. She was asked by the language school director to stay longer until a replacement could be found for a teacher who had to return to the United States. Donna loved Japan as much as I did, so agreeing to stay for a couple of months was not difficult. We visited numerous times, and she joined my mother and me for part of our whirlwind tour of Japan. All of this added to the uniqueness of our long and deepening friendship. Eventually, she headed back to CUC. From there, we communicated regularly until I returned.



On a humorous note, there was an ego boost aspect about Japan which I had also forgotten. In Canada, when I shop, my clothing size is *small*. In Japan, I immediately jump to a medium without having to do anything more than buy clothes!

My Spiritual Life

Although most of my religious experience was built on my contemplation of Jesus' life, it also included random selections of scripture. Those random bits had a far greater influence on my spiritual formation than I often realized. One of those bits was Psalm 139. I memorized the chapter in high school. While I found many verses meaningful and encouraging others troubled me. As a young missionary living on the far side of the Pacific, these verses often came to mind and comforted me:

*Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Thy presence?...
If I take the wings of the dawn,
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of me.*

On the other hand, as awareness of my orientation intensified, these verses troubled me:

*For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother's womb....
My frame was not hidden from You,*

*When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;
Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them.*

Psalm 139 helped to create my theology and then collided with it. If I had not taken scripture so seriously, the angst would not have been so intense. I wrestled with texts like this because I filtered my experience through scripture—as I had been taught to do. Beautiful passages like Psalm 139, which friends might ponder for a time and move on from, caused me spiritual distress. Whether it was in the womb or in my formative years, I experienced my orientation as something “woven” into my person. To borrow Jesus’ comment about eunuchs—I felt I was either “born that way” or “made that way.”

I often wondered how God could have been so involved in the forming of my “substance” and yet have handed me over to dishonorable passions because I failed to worship God correctly. This is where my “plain reading” approach to Romans chapter one got me into trouble. While I can reconcile these passages now, at the time they bewildered me. Sometimes the conflict tore down my faith rather than build it up. To this spiritual background noise, I added my new preoccupation with personal victory and continual obedience.

I had brought my copy of Venden’s sermons on victory and continual obedience with me. Many a quiet morning while still alone in the empty language school, I reflected on his writings. I was more determined than ever to practice the three tangibles he insisted would bring me to a place of personal victory—prayer, Bible study, and Christian witness. For yet another year, I was as intentional about my devotions as I had ever been. I studied my Bible daily and I prayed over the names of family, friends, and students. As a missionary, of course, my days were filled with “Christian witness.”

My devotional life was personally uplifting and gave me a great sense of peace and contentment as well as cultivating a deep appreciation of the way of living that Jesus modeled. At the same time, there was no change in my orientation. Because I longed to experience some form of victory over my attractions or some reprieve from the distress, my devotions started to feel like a formula rather than the “thoughtful hour with Jesus” it had always been. Like with insanity, I was doing the same thing over and over and over without experiencing the desired result. My devotions became a substitute for reaching out to someone to talk to. By withdrawing into my very private world of study and prayer, I kept everything locked up inside. I fooled myself into thinking my emotional numbness and stoic control over needs and passions were evidence of victory in my life. This false victory had consequences. I started to experience resentment toward others when they expressed human need—especially intimacy.

One female teacher, for example, experienced more homesickness than the rest of us; or at least she expressed it. I remember feeling annoyed that she was so easily affected by such a mundane need as a connection with family and friends. I did feel lonely from time to time; but when I did, I pushed that feeling aside. I was not able to appreciate her need as a normal response to her circumstances because I never allowed myself to feel much of anything. While I responded appropriately, I could feel the resentment within. I remember thinking that if she would just do as I did—study the Bible and seek God in prayer—she would experience the same control as I did, the same victory!

The other experience of resentment was tied directly to my orientation.

It was obvious that one male teacher liked “the ladies.” He also liked photography, and he had many pictures of and with female friends. When I say that they were constantly frolicking in parks and hugging trees in playful poses, I want you to pick up on my resentment. It rose out of a deep ache from wanting to experience his freedom, his comfort, with physical affection and

playful intimacy. Every time I saw one of his photos, however, I was reminded of how different we were. I didn't long to frolic with the girls, and I knew it. I wanted to hug trees with male friends, and I could feel it. Whether it had been five photos or five hundred, it would have made no difference. Each picture triggered those why questions, and I felt a profound psychological and spiritual weight.

My feelings of resentment toward the homesick female teacher and the playful male teacher were the result of moving through life as I had walked through that shed full of bees during my summer job—aware of everything around me but detached from it all. Coping with my orientation the way I did created a wound, and the wound was growing deeper. I was numb but interpreted it as strength. My personality was changing and resentment was one of the consequences.

Like my first year in Japan, my orientation made itself known in the usual ways. Certain male students triggered strong feelings of attraction, and that troubled me. On occasion, at the invitation of a friend, or out of necessity, I was obligated to make a trip to the public bath. With each visit came the accompanying angst. As I said, my accommodations were different. In the little house I shared with the other male teacher, we had our own rooms. It was much easier to be as private as I wanted. As before, there were opportunities to date, but I easily complied with the unspoken expectation not to get involved with the locals. One anecdote with respect to awareness of my orientation stands out from that year.

As a typical twenty-two-year-old, I had a normal curiosity about sex. The mix of my faith and my orientation added a layer of complexity, and Tokyo provided the opportunity to explore my curiosity. No, I didn't have a sexual encounter. The situation was more adolescent in nature, but no less stressful.

I was pretty naïve when it came to condoms. My earliest memory of such is of a “used one” ground into the gravel in our elementary school parking lot. The older guys made jokes about “it” which I pretended to understand. All I picked up on was that it was somehow related to something men and women did in cars late at night. Except for that schoolyard discovery and seeing the odd condom dispenser in grungy service station washrooms, condoms were never a part of my world—until Japan.



The ubiquitous vending machine that dispensed everything from cigarettes to soap to rice also dispensed condoms. Not tucked away in washrooms but out on the streets usually in front of pharmacies. During my first year, I corralled a Japanese friend into explaining what those machines dispensed. That awkward conversation occurred only once. At that time, I wasn't very interested. Things were different this time.

Like trying not to think about pink elephants after saying pink elephants, those machines beckoned me every time I passed one. After months of thinking about the contents, I couldn't resist any longer. Late one night, I told my roommate I was “going for a walk.” That walk took me past a pharmacy I knew was located on a very quiet street in our neighborhood.

As I deposited the appropriate yen into the machine and waited for the contents to emerge, my heart beat as if I were committing a crime. When the little box slid into the mouth of the dispenser, it sounded like a passing train. I

grabbed my purchase and fled down the dimly lit street hoping no one had seen me. After all, what would a “single” missionary need with condoms?

I examined the contents, but only when I knew for certain that I was home alone. I discarded them as quickly and discreetly as I had obtained them. I did this a couple of times.

I’m sure my foray into sex education was not unique to me. While others might have felt a sense of naughtiness, their experimentation would have been within the realm of acceptability even within a conservative religious context. Naughty isn’t how I felt. When I examined my purchase, it was through the filter of my faith and orientation. Although I “made” myself create images of what was supposed to be the “natural” use of a condom, those images soon faded. The images that flowed naturally were linked to men.

Whatever one might think about a single Christian buying condoms, you can’t imagine the angst I felt when I couldn’t separate my sexual interests from my same-sex attraction. I couldn’t even buy a condom without homosexual images intruding. When the natural biological functioning that God had woven into my male substance responded accordingly, I felt my body was betraying me. With this, more shame was linked to my physical being. If I could have turned off my attractions I would have. If I could have produced feelings for “the girls” I would have. How was I to confess or repent of my body? I ached at times from the stress, and I cried in secret when I couldn’t manage it any longer. A good cry released some of the energy, but it all returned the moment I interacted with the world again.

This brings me back to Psalm 139. Reciting the first six verses in prayer was often the closest I came to naming my experience before God. I believe that by repeating back to God—pushing back at God—with the heartfelt words of King David my faith and sanity were preserved. Despite my conflict and confusion, I clung to the belief that like David, God knew me, understood me, scrutinized

me, and was intimately acquainted with all my ways—even before there was a proper “naming of my experience” on my tongue.

As I have told my story, I have purposely separated my spiritual practices from awareness of my orientation in order to highlight each. They were, in fact, inseparable and played off each other constantly. Everything or everyone I interacted with throughout the year was touched by my orientation in some way. It was another wonderful year despite the weight I carried.



This year, like the first, came to an end faster than I had hoped. Only a sense of obligation to complete my degree tore me from the work, the country, and people I loved. I had arrived in winter and I would leave in winter. One farewell gift made up for the sadness of my approaching departure. The language school director and two students decided to take me on a road trip to Mount Fuji. I had climbed the mountain twice already, once the first year and again that August. Getting up-close-and-personal with this iconic symbol of Japan was not the treat, it was the uniqueness of the trip.

Because it was December, Fuji was capped in snow and every view was spectacular. We stopped many times as we circled its base. In the late afternoon, we drove as far up the mountain as we could before stopping in a parking lot just above the tree line. The sun was intense enough to entice us to remove our coats despite a cool breeze. There wasn't another person in sight—an unusual experience in Japan. With no one around to trigger our adult inhibitions, we played on the slopes in the snow like children. We would have hiked higher had we had more time and not been startled by thunder coming from one small passing cloud. It was a surreal hour and the perfect farewell gift.

I made it home for Christmas Eve, but barely. As my flight from Tokyo approached San Francisco, we were diverted to Los Angeles because of fog. My connecting flight was from San Francisco! Miss it, and I would miss Christmas. After an hour and a half of sitting on the tarmac in L.A., we headed back for San Francisco. The same fog that had prevented our initial arrival had also delayed the departure of my connection. I made it home for Christmas. Spending Christmas at home was pleasant, but I missed Japan. Within a week, I was back in Alberta and ready to pick up where I had left off the previous year.



STUDENT MISSIONARY IDENTIFICATION

This certifies that Gerald A. Mc Kay a student
of Canadian Union College, is a Student Missionary
College
sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,
and is assigned to Japan Union Mission,
from January 1978 to January 1979,
Date *Date*

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Pain nourishes courage. You can't be brave if
you've only had wonderful things happen to you.

—Mary Tyler Moore

European KINSHIP Meeting

1-5 September Seminarhotel Odenwald, Germany

We invite you to join us at the beautiful Seminar Hotel Odenwald near Frankfurt where Kinship has held both an EKM meeting and several Safe Places trainings.

[<http://www.seminarhotel-odenwald.de/>]



Our primary speaker will be Dr. Arlene Taylor, a brain development and function specialist, who has a very interesting way of talking with groups. She will be talking on:

- The Brain and Spirituality
- The Brain and Sex/Gender and Orientation
- The Brain and Sex Differences
- The Brain and Humor
- The Brain and How to Talk about Difficult Issues

Saturday night we will have a presentation of: *A Gay SDA Play*. For our Sunday excursion, Kinship Germany is planning a Magical Mystery Tour. We plan to have at least one German-speaking session. There are lovely walking trails and comfortable places to sit in the back yard and have coffee.

The cost will be: € 299.-

Information: write to Catherine Taylor,
coordinator EKM2016 at katgurian@aol.com

▾
Note: Registration for EKM-holiday is closed,
but feel free to visit us and join us for day excursions.

Book and the Beach — The Kind God of the Old Testament?

October 26-30, 2016



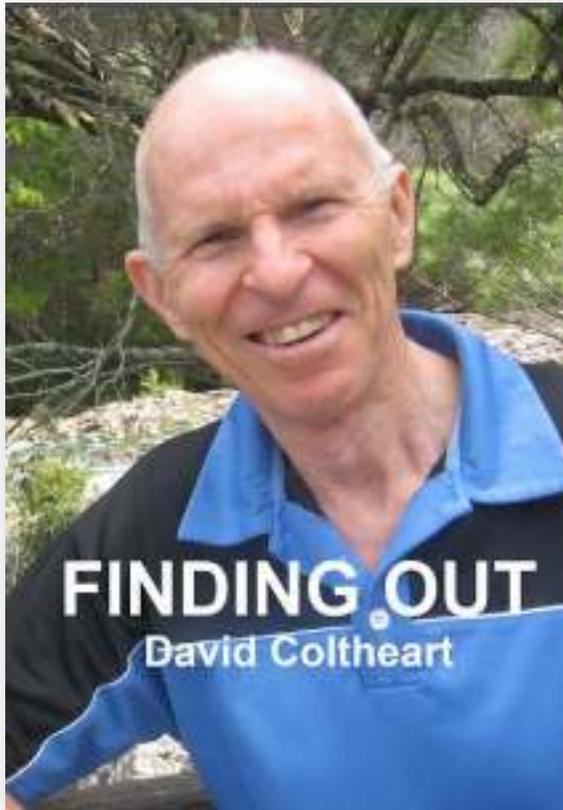
Cost \$240.00 per person

Many of us picture a gentle Jesus in the New Testament and an Old Testament God of wrath. This year, our study time will be a mix of presentation and discussion. We'll look at Old Testament stories, their contexts, and the ways actions we've often considered vindictive were actually examples of Divine grace, patience, and protectiveness. For Sabbath, we'll be joined by David Dildy, a local lawyer, who is a student of history and the character of God. We will, of course, continue our tradition of afternoon adventures.

You can register at

<http://sdakinship.org/events/78-book-beach-mini-kampmeeting.html>.

We look forward to seeing you!



An autobiography

Now available on line at

<http://findingout.webs.com/>

The author writes:

"I am happy to announce that my 300-page autobiography is finally ready to read and is now available online to download as a PDF. Six years in the making, it tells the story of my life back in New Zealand, my growing up years, my college years, and the 28 years I had in the [Seventh-day Adventist] ministry. Obviously, the whole point of the book is my coming-out story and how I reconciled my sexuality with my spirituality. At least one person (Carrol Grady) has an honorable mention and I pay special

tribute to her role in making the last ten years the happiest of my life (or anyone's life). The book finishes with our commitment ceremony in 2011 and our wedding in 2014.

"I pray that the book, called *Finding Out*, will make a positive contribution to people's lives and will add to the vast amount of literature designed to tell people who we are. You can download the book (free) here: <http://findingout.webs.com/>

"Don't forget to go to the Photo Gallery as well. Please feel free to share the link as you wish.

"God bless,

"David Coltheart

"Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia"

David also appears in the new documentary *Here I Am* in which gay and lesbian Christians tell their own stories. Designed as a discussion starter for Christians to use with their families and churches, the 35-minute movie is available free on YouTube and Vimeo.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSjAan3OuJA>

- <https://vimeo.com/158130932>

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST KINSHIP INTERNATIONAL, INC. ▽

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WHO WE ARE...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a non-profit support organization. We minister to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals and their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is a global organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people worldwide.

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 2,500 people in more than forty-three countries.

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn or even mention homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

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SUPPORT KINSHIP

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to SDA Kinship Int'l, PO Box 244, Orinda, CA 94563 or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.



PO Box 244 ♦ Orinda, CA 94563 ♦ USA

or visit Kinship's website

www.sdakinship.org/resources

for information about:

- Find a Gay Friendly Church
- Homosexuality: Can We Talk About It?*
- Living Eden's Gifts*
- Previous *Connection* issues... and more.

-www.someone-to-talk-to.net

-www.buildingsafeplaces.org

-www.itgetsbetter.org

-www.sgamovie.com

-www.facebook.com/sdakinship... and more

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Connection

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