



Safe Places

Newsletter

<http://www.buildingsafeplaces.org/>

September 2015

Many claim that a position of trust in the church gives them authority to dictate what other men should believe and what they should do.

This claim, God does not sanction.

Ellen G. White

Desire of Ages Chapter 45,

Foreshadowing of the Cross pg. 414

Christ himself did not suppress one word of truth but He spoke it always in love.

He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful kind attention in His intercourse with the people.

He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe words, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul.

He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief and iniquity but tears were in his voice.

Ellen G. White

Desire of Ages pg. 353

We hope you are doing well.

Normally, for our **Visions of God and the Church**, we commission or share writings by Adventist pastors, Bible workers, lay leaders, teachers, and administrators. In September's *Safe Places*, as in the previous 4, we appreciated Dr. Gil Valentine's discussion of ways the 1888 message affects the leadership of the Adventist church as it deals with difficult issues. What we are doing differently this month is also featuring an article by an Adventist bisexual man who is very committed to the study of the Bible.

In **Resources** we are introducing you to *The Point Foundation*, an organization that helps LGBTI students, many who have been rejected by their families and church community, to complete their education. We also include a report the Intercollegiate Adventist Gay/Straight Coalition (IAGC) on their activities from last year and some plans for this next school season.

When we first began *Safe Places*, our primary **Research** request was for studies of brain structure and biological difference between heterosexual and LGBTI persons. We have published many of the recent studies already. You can find them on our website. As we come across additional studies of that kind, we will be sure to cite them here. This month there are two studies in this section: one about same-sex parenting, and one about changing opinions about same sex marriage in the United States.

Voices from the Heart continues Jerry McKay's story of his journey to integrate his Adventism and orientation. Jill and Sherri Babcock also write about the gifts and challenges of being a two-mother family.

The pastors of Northern Germany are meeting this month to think about ways to address the issue of homosexuality in their churches and discuss ways to care for the LGBTI Adventists in their community. We wish you a good meeting and will be praying for you.

October 10, in Southern California there will be a Hot Topics in Safe Places meeting at the Long Beach Seventh-day Adventist Church. Dr. Arlene Taylor will be presenting *Spirituality and the Brain; Sex, Gender, Orientation and the Brain*; and *The Brain Helps* with Hot Topic discussions. The next evening, in La Sierra, there will be a presentation of *The Gay SDA Play*. For more information on these events, you can contact us at info@buildingsafeplaces.org. If you would like to present a Hot Topics in Safe Places day at your church or school, you can contact us at the same address.

If you are interested in upcoming Building Safe Places—for Everyone events, you can access them on our website under Events.

As always, if you know of someone who would enjoy and benefit from reading this newsletter, feel most welcome to share it with them. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, you can reach us at editor@buildingsafeplaces.org. If you would no longer like to receive this newsletter, just let us know. If you would like to write an article, we encourage you to contact us.

Meanwhile, we wish you gentle blessings,

Catherine Taylor and the Building Safe Places Team: Frieder Schmid, Ingrid Schmid, Dave Ferguson, Floyd Pönitz, and Ruud Kieboom.

✂ Send your comments about the September issue to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ✂

Church in the Crucible: the 1888 Conference that shapes 21st Century Adventism

The rigidity of church structure that has made it so difficult for the church to adjust to the ordination of women and accepting women in leadership reminds one of the rigidity and inadequacy of church structure in 1901. In this present development there is renewed discussion on what is the role of union conferences and how much latitude they are able to exercise in pursuing the mission of the church in different cultural and social contexts.

[Read more on page 4](#)

How traditional Biblical views can cut off love, enlightenment and even life

Theology doesn't happen in a vacuum. We come to understand our faith through a prism of relationships. So why is it that when Christians reach a new or different—for them—understanding of scripture and how to live their faith in relationship with others, we sort them into two camps?

[Read more on page 8](#)

The Point Foundation

The Point Foundation empowers promising lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students to achieve their full academic and leadership potential—despite the obstacles often put before them—to make a significant impact on society.

[Read more on page 10](#)

IAGC: We are Ambassadors

I would like to take a few moments and share with you what the Intercollegiate Adventist GSA Coalition (IAGC) has been doing over the past year, as I and each of the IAGC officers and member-group leaders have been very busy!

[Read more on page 11](#)

Parent-reported measures of child health and wellbeing in same-sex parent families

It has been suggested that children with same-sex attracted parents score well in psycho-social aspects of their health; however, questions remain about the impact of stigma on these children. Research to date has focused on lesbian parents and has been limited by small sample sizes. This study aims to describe the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of Australian children with same-sex attracted parents, and the impact that stigma has on them.

[Read more on page 15](#)

U.S. public support for same-sex marriage is rising dramatically

A majority of people in the United States support marriage equality, regardless of how various polls frame the question, according to a new report.

[Read more on page 16](#)

Being a Two-mother Family

This article is based on an interview with Jill and Sherri, who were asked to share the gifts and challenges they have faced as a lesbian couple, raising their two children.

[Read more on page 17](#)

Jerry McKay's Journey (part four)

[Read more on page 19](#)



“1888 - The Unending Story of Seventh-day Adventist Reformation”

Church in the Crucible: the 1888 Conference that shapes 21st Century Adventism

The 1888 Minneapolis Conference shaped the development of the Adventist church in the decades that followed. This presentation explores how the themes and insights of 1888 continue to inform Adventism in its endeavor to be a *semper reformanda* church, with particular emphasis on responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century.



By Gilbert M Valentine, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Administration and Leadership
School of Education/La Sierra University

c) Church Structure

The rigidity of church structure that has made it so difficult for the church to adjust to the ordination of women and accepting women in leadership reminds one of the rigidity and inadequacy of church structure in 1901. In this present development there is renewed discussion on what is the role of union conferences and how much latitude they are able to exercise in pursuing the mission of the church in different cultural and social contexts. There is real tension at the present time between the concepts of unity and uniformity. The new assertiveness of some unions which, some have observed, has been necessary to break the stalemate that has paralyzed the church now for several decades poses an opportunity for the church to think about what are the true sources of unity. Will we see a renewal of the self-identity and the responsibilities of the Unions for an expanding mission in their territories? Parallels with 1901 and the impact of *semper reformanda* at that time could be suggestive for the present.

This is not to say that perhaps more autonomous union structures will more readily solve the tensions that inevitably arise around issues that

are in some way of universal significance in a global faith community. My recent study on the travails of the world-wide Anglican community and the struggle that that community has had in order to maintain communion while accepting differences in the order of their ministry, is illustrative of this.ⁱ The structure of the Anglican community is such that the 38 provinces that comprise its worldwide geographical organization are autonomous and self-governed—and yet they need to recognize each other’s ministry because in Anglicanism the role of the Eucharist as an instrument of unity is very important. However, they have managed to find ways of embracing the ordination of women to the priesthood and at the same time maintain unity. We have much to learn from them about their change management processes.

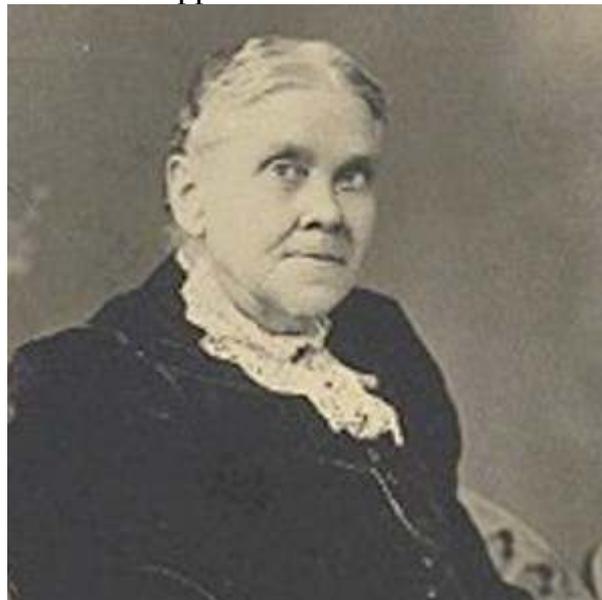
d) Biblical Authority and Creedalism

A major issue that is darkening the horizon of the denomination at the present time is the relationship between science and religion and its spin-off issue of the question of origins. The relationship between science and religion was of course

already a problem at the end of the 19th century at the time of the 1888 conference. But the problem has become much more serious now and somehow the church will need to develop mechanisms and frameworks and a climate of acceptance and trust so that church members who daily wrestle with the implications of the findings of science in their workplace can still feel at home in the Adventist church. Is what we are seeing in recent years a reactionary trend to try to deal with dissent and dissonance by resorting to creedal resolutions? It would seem that we have not learned very well from the experience of 1888 that the adoption of creedal resolutions is not an appropriate way to deal with the issue. Do current developments reflect a significant change in the use of the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs from a convenient summary of the convictions of the community for those who might inquire from outside the community to an instrument of assessing orthodoxy for those inside the community? If so, this is a reversal of a core foundational conviction on which Seventh-day Adventism was built and marks a shift away from an anti-creedal movement to a creedal movement. Perhaps some would argue that this is inevitable.

A question to be asked would be whether it would be well for the movement at the present time, to be reminded of the warnings of Ellen White in 1888. “The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions . . . but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement.” It was Ellen White’s conviction that “Christlike forbearance” of some variation of belief was necessary.ⁱⁱ She was prepared to concede it in such central articles of faith as Justification by Faith (the article according to Luther, of a standing or a falling church.) She was prepared to concede variation in understanding in the area of Christology and the Trinity. The fact that Ellen White may have written very clearly on a topic did not mean for her that it was a final understanding. In 1890 she clearly practiced what she believed when in the controversy over the meaning of the covenants she did not insist that ministers agree with the perspective that she had previously published in *Patriarchs and Prophets*—which was a position she said at the time she had been “shown” was correct.ⁱⁱⁱ In regard to the current attempt to

reword the text of Fundamental Belief # 6 using language that is not derived from scripture but which is designed to exclude particular interpretations of scripture, is it helpful to remember again Ellen White’s approach in 1888?



“Many commit the error of trying to define minutely the fine points of distinction between justification and sanctification. Into the definitions of these two terms they often bring their own ideas and speculations. Why try to be more minute than is Inspiration on the vital questions of righteousness by faith? Why try to work out every minute point, as if the salvation of the soul depended upon all having exactly your understanding of this matter? All cannot see in the same line of vision. You are in danger of making a world of an atom, and an atom of a world.”^{iv}

Reasserting the Protestant principle of sola scriptura may well be the task of *semper reformanda* in helping Adventism to ensure the continuing unity of the community in the twenty-first century.

e) The Role and Authority of Ellen White

A hugely important contributing factor to the difficulties in the 1888 episode was the role and function of Ellen White’s spiritual gift and her authority. What proved to be so problematic was that the exercise of Ellen White’s charisma clearly involved what George Knight calls “flexibility” as she addressed new problems, new circumstances and new understandings. Whatever furthered the mission of the church was her guiding principle. If an expression might be borrowed from Elder Jan Paulsen on a different issue, her approach might

be described as “principled pragmatism.” For the men of her generation who operated within a mindset of black and white, fixed truths and boundaries, and a rigidity of conviction, this was a real challenge. The men did not have the intellectual and theological constructs that enabled them to cope with the kind of change and variation she represented. In a sense there was an unpredictability about her counsel and that called for an attitude of submission—not always easy to exercise when it went against one’s own rational convictions. Some Adventist leaders who experienced this cognitive dissonance tended to reject the charisma and become hostile and this created real tensions in the shared leadership of the church and in their own spiritual experience.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century I think it may be easier for us to observe this flexibility and principled pragmatism in her writings. New studies such as *The Prophet and the Presidents* suggest a way forward in this area.^v Keeping this principle in mind allows us to recognize that the things she wrote that may sound like universals and expressions of truth for all time were actually conditioned by time and circumstance and that “principled pragmatism” is still the best approach for church leaders to adopt today in administrative decision making, even as the church wrestles with complex issues such as science and religion and women in ministry.

f) Sexual Orientation Issues

Nothing has changed quite so quickly in modern society as attitudes in the matter of sexual orientation. This has occurred because of the new understandings arising from the rapidly developing and wide-ranging studies in the biological and neurological sciences. The public discus-

sion of the issues that is now occurring regularly on websites such as Spectrum, the production of the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists* and the changing attitudes of society is confronting the church with the need to deal with this issue. This is an issue that church young people repeatedly ask about and Elder Paulsen bravely confronted some of these issues in his series of conversations “Let’s Talk,” recently published as a book.^{vi} Whatever we may think of homosexual practice, the church, says Paulsen, must reform its attitudes toward brothers and sisters of different sexual orientation. This is an area where the meaning of “grace” needs, as never before, to shape our congregational and community life.

Recent *Spectrum* blog contributions from Dylan Padgett, a student at Southern Adventist University, and Aubyn Fulton, professor of psychology at Pacific Union College, in response to the announcement of an unofficial organization on the campus of Southern Adventist University to provide a safe haven for gay students highlights the urgency of this as a proper subject of *semper reformanda*.

Dylan Padgett expresses well the dilemma the church faces on the issue.

Whether or not you believe that any non-heterosexual orientation is a choice and a sin, the fact is that our youth are afraid to ask questions or seek help, and feel as though they are less of a person because of the unrelenting attack on a small but fundamental part of who they are. Studies show that, as a result, LGBTQIA youth in America are four times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual youth. It is not an expression of love, no matter how well intended, to condemn us for what you might perceive to be a grievous sin. To ignore these realities does not negate the truth and to respond to them with



anything other than receptivity and understanding is to promote the continued alienation of our LGBTQIA youth.

Matthew 7:18 states that “a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.” In context, the passage identifies a litmus test for detecting false prophets. However, I believe the message is applicable to ideology as well. When the mindset of the Church toward non-heterosexuality yields the bad fruit of division, depression, and suicide, the mindset needs to change.^{vii}

Fulton highlights the rapidity with which change is occurring.

I am old enough to remember when “living outside of the biblical prescription” would have been assumed by most Adventists to include people who were divorced, people who were in interracial relationships, people who attended the

movies, people who wore nail polish, and people who ate French fries fried in lard (or fried in vessels that were recently used to fry things in lard). Yet today people who engage in these practices would be baptized in most Adventist churches.

I think we know enough now to know that interpretations of what is in and outside of Biblical prescriptions changes over time—and in my experience, most of those changes have been for the better. I have not given up on the Adventist community.... As the article that spawned this thread illustrates, things are changing, even in the Adventist church, a lot faster than most of us can keep up with. Who would have guessed, even five years ago, that an out gay man would be able to sign his name to a public testimony like this and attend Southern University? God is good....^{viii}

ⁱ “Flying Bishops, Women Clergy and the Processes of Change in the Anglican Communion,” (ASRS November 2012) Andrews University Seminary Studies, forthcoming.

ⁱⁱ Ellen G. White, MS 24 1892.

ⁱⁱⁱ See George Knight *Angry Saints*, 86-91, 114.

^{iv} Ellen G. White Diary Entry, MS 21, 1888

^v Valentine, *The Prophet and the Presidents*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2011). ^{vi} See the report:

<http://news.adventist.org/archive/articles/2013/04/30/church-chat-former-adventist-church-president-reflects-on-lets-talk-convers>

^{vii} Padgett, *Ibid*. Padgett is president of the recently established SHIELD organization, a non-confrontational, unofficial, student-led organization at Southern Adventist University that is meant to help the students without regard to sexual orientation or identity. We aim not to modify the Church’s doctrine, but to reshape its attitude by promoting an open atmosphere of awareness, education, understanding, and respectful conversation between the greater community and ourselves. Our student leaders are working closely with our sponsor, other faculty members, and administrative staff to demonstrate our consideration of the sensitive nature of this topic, to ensure our consistency with Southern’s values in addition to our own, and to show that we have nothing to hide. As an unofficial club, we shall maintain our fierce dedication to the betterment of our community and to the spiritual well-being of all. We aspire to be a voice for the voiceless, a representative for those who cannot represent themselves, and to be a manifestation of love and concern in the spirit of Jesus for our fellow humans; we are a Safe Haven for Individuality, Education, Love, and Dialogue. We are a SHIELD.

^{viii} <http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/2013/02/28/shielding-southern> (Accessed March 2, 2013)



How traditional Biblical views can cut off love, enlightenment and even life



By Eliel Cruz

Photo credit: Joshua Martin

July 30, 2015

Theology doesn't happen in a vacuum. We come to understand our faith through a prism of relationships. So why is it that when Christians reach a new or different—for them—understanding of scripture and how to live their faith in relationship with others, we sort them into two camps?

One camp: The people who base their theology in the narrow terms of only traditional male-female relationships.

And the other camp: The people who—through relationships with LGBT people as family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and congregants—accept or “affirm” them as fellow travelers in faith.

Affirming individuals in their identity in Christ,

1) It doesn't matter who you know but that you know and care about people beyond yourself.

This is why every time someone from a traditional Christian denomination steps forward, announcing their affirmation of LGBT believers, it starts with a personal story. A family member. A friend. A couple. Someone they already know.

This relationship marks a turning point in their theology when they begin to reevaluate their sincerely held beliefs. This was the case for Christian ethicist David Gushee, Pastor Danny Cortez, theologian James Brownson, Christian blogger Rachel Held Evans, and evangelical leader Tony Campolo.

It'll be the case for others to come.

Traditional conservatives write off these individuals as simply biased toward their friends and family. This is particularly true when Christian parents affirm an LGBT child. Critics assume they are just letting emotions cloud their judgment of their child (as if every parent's judgment is not clouded by love).

their sexual and gender identities, and their relationships is important. It makes a huge difference not only to the people being accepted but also to the people who have found a way, in their faith, to accept their neighbors—all their neighbors.

Here are three ways to understand the impact of relationships on affirming theology on same-sex relationships.

Yet, it's traditionalists who have their approach to theology all wrong.

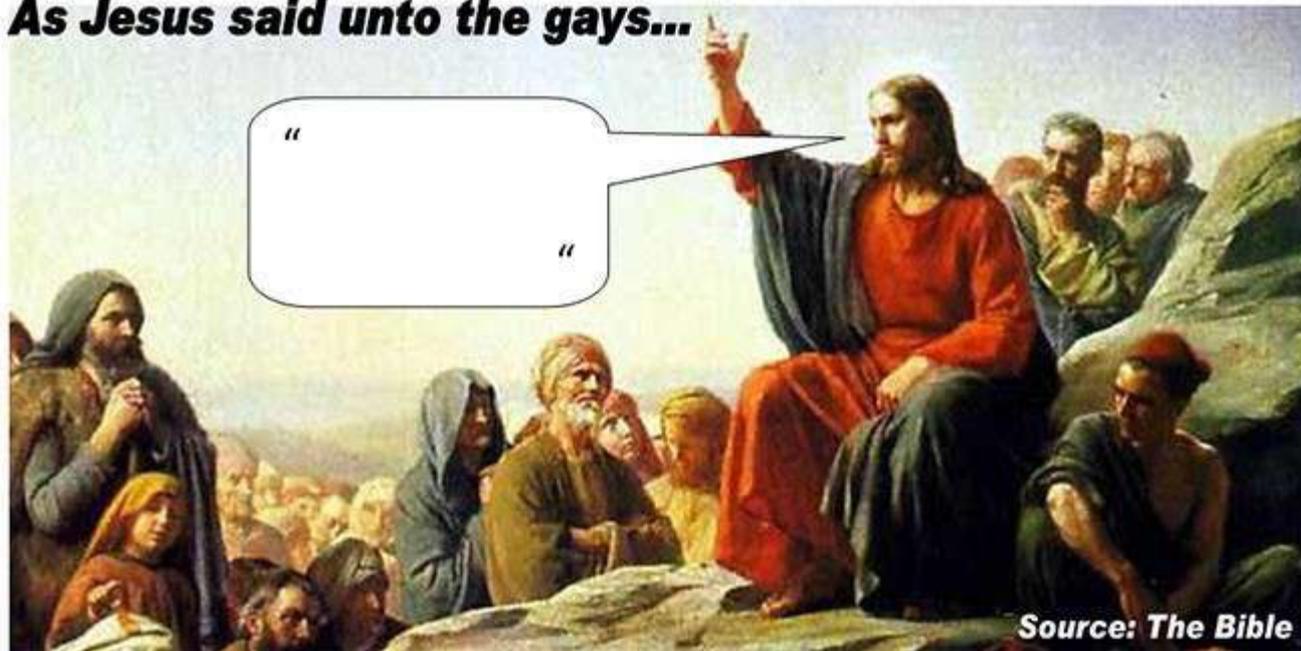
What Christians against same-sex relationships are trying to do is divorce the LGBT experience from their theology.

That simply will not work and it's unbiblical. The word of God was made flesh for this very reason. Jesus informs our legalistic views of theology. He told us to include Gentiles in the church and to include all at the table. He dined with tax collectors and befriended prostitutes. The relationships Jesus formed with sinners are a model for us.

Relationships allow us to humanize a subject. We aren't just talking about theology; we are talking about people. We're talking about me. We're talking about families and friends. We shouldn't be treated like we're nothing, like theoretical subjects. We are in your lives. We matter.

✂ Send your comments about this article to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ✂

As Jesus said unto the gays...



2) Trying to talk theology without talking about the real people in our lives is dangerous

Our theology affects those around us. When families reject their children, it increases the likelihood for suicide among LGBT youth.

Reparative therapy has proven to be harmful. Medical professionals acknowledge that there is nothing inherently unhealthy about being LGBT. Indeed, last month a jury found that offering such therapy is “consumer fraud.”

When Christians affirm same-sex couples they are opening their minds and hearts and eyes to see what these relationships mean not only to the couple but to the wider world. They add to the

3) Time and time again Christians change.

We already know what it means to have our experience inform our theology. In the civil rights era, we came to read Genesis 9:25, which speak of the curse of Ham, in a different light. Sometimes it’s because we were simply wrong (see slavery) and other times we upheld archaic patriarchal standards (see women’s role in church) that clouded our judgment.

- See more at: <http://elielcruz.religionnews.com/2015/07/30/traditional-biblical-views-can-cut-off-love-enlightenment-even-life/#sthash.PvTwVVur.dpuf>

love in the world.

I’ve met thousands of LGBT people of faith who are better Christians than many who condemn them. Their faith compels them to be part of a church that, for the most part, preaches against their humanity.

There are devoted same-sex Christian couples raising their kids in the church so that their kids get the experience of being part of a community of Christians. There are LGBT seminarians finishing years of study for churches that will never accept their service.

But we have (sometimes) repented for our views and have come to better understandings in our theology. The same must be true with same-sex relationships.

We should use our experiences together as the lens to our theology. It’s not only biblical it’s also necessary for a life-sustaining interpretation of scripture.

⌘ Send your comments about this article to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ⌘



The Point Foundation:

<http://pointfoundation.org/>

Point Foundation empowers promising lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students to achieve their full academic and leadership potential—despite the obstacles often put before them—to make a significant impact on society.

Point Foundation (Point) is the nation's largest scholarship-granting organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students of merit. Point promotes change through scholarship funding, mentorship, leadership development, and community service training.

Scholarship Funding:

Point provides direct financial contribution toward the cost of attending the nation's top educational institutions.

Mentorship:

Point mentors build rewarding, personal relationships and serve as exemplary role models for the organization's scholars, as well as advice on professional career decisions.

Leadership Development:

Point provides training in leadership development, accountability and advocacy for the LGBTQ community and beyond.

Community Service Training:

Point promotes philanthropic efforts through required community service projects, shaping the future of the next generation of the LGBTQ community.

By identifying and supporting these scholars, Point hopes to provide a greater level of acceptance, respect, and tolerance within future generations for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity.



Point Foundation empowers change through education and leadership and is a champion for equal access to higher education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students.

Point Foundation seeks the partnership of philanthropic individuals, corporations, and foundations to supply financial support, professional guidance, and a network of contacts for LGBTQ undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students. Additionally, Point believes in honoring both the scholars and the donors who are investing in the future. Therefore, Point honors the donors, if they so choose, by creating a legacy named after themselves, or as a memorial for a loved one. This arrangement ensures their personal identification with scholars and with the mission of Point Foundation in perpetuity.

✂ Send your comments about this article to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ✂





By Jefferson Clark

Iwould like to take a few moments and share with you what the Intercollegiate Adventist GSA Coalition (IAGC) has been doing over the past year, as I and each of the IAGC officers and member-group leaders have been very busy!

An IAGC Update

The 2014-2015 School Year

At this time, the IAGC now has gay/straight-alliance student groups on seven Seventh-day Adventist college and university campuses across North America:

- * Andrews University (*AULLAOne*)
- * La Sierra University (*PRISM*)
- * Southern Adventist University (*SHIELD*)
- * Washington Adventist University (*Q&A*)
- * Walla Walla University (*Students for Equality*)
- * Pacific Union College (*GASP*)
- * Union College (*Beacon*)

Since this past June, when I was elected as IAGC President, I was able to attend the Gay Christian Network conference in Portland, Oregon (read my reflection piece: *Heard, Understood, and Loved*) in January, and the Reformation Project conference in Atlanta, Georgia in June, where I attended a variety of presentations and workshops regarding the topic of LGBTI Christians. Each conference offered valuable information that I am now able to use as I work with the IAGC member-group leaders and students regarding the conflict of sexuality and spirituality that these individuals face and work to understand.

I have also been working with students and allies on our campuses that do not have gay-straight alliances, as they work to create safe

spaces on their campuses, from creating documents with questions and advice, to counseling them as they speak with campus administration and helping to find support for the new groups in their areas. Through this, the new student group at Union College, *Beacon*, was formed with the help of alumnus AJ Oetman; the campus has been doing a lot to move forward in helping marginalized students. It has been awesome seeing the leaps and bounds this new group has made, as the campus has been fairly open-minded and willing to help the LGBTI individuals, to a certain extent. And on the Burman University campus in Canada, Eric Anderson has been working to build the foundation for a the new student group, *This Is Me*, in hopes that students will soon step up and take on leadership roles in forming a strong group that will serve the LGBTI and allies in this area.

Our student group at Andrews University, *AULLAOne*, has had a busy year as well, after students were told they could not hold a fundraiser on campus for Project Fierce, a Chicago-based organization that works to help LGBTI homeless youth. After news about this went viral, the group set up a Kickstarter campaign which ended up raising close to \$17,000 for Project

Fierce. From this, university administration has created task forces that will focus specifically on these issues and will hopefully work more closely with our group.

And at Southern Adventist University, the student group *SHIELD* has had multiple presentations on campus specifically covering LGBTI topics and issues. Although the presentations have not been as harmful as was experienced in the Winter 2014 semester, they have not been beneficial or helpful. As the Committee for Education Regarding Student Sexual Activity (CERSSA) became more visible, the president of *SHIELD* (Mischka Scott) and I were invited to a meeting, after I met with Alan Parker, the committee chair-

The 4th Annual IAGC Summit A Business Affair

This year, the IAGC Summit was held at the Kellogg West Conference Center and Hotel on the beautiful campus of Cal Poly in Pomona, California! Without the assistance of SDA Kinship International, this would not have been possible. We had a total of 11 attendees, which included students and alumni from Andrews University, La Sierra University, Southern Adventist University, Pacific Union College, and Union College, as well as our own SDA Kinship Adviser, Dave Ferguson, and faculty advisers Paul Mallory (La Sierra University) and Randi Robertson (Andrews University). It was wonderful and encouraging having this many attendees, knowing that they took time away from their busy schedules to discuss the work being done on their campuses.

On the first day of the Summit, each of the student-leaders gave an update on their campus and the work being done, the difficulties, and what they have planned for the coming school year. We also received a message of encouragement from Candace Hartnett of *Agape Empowerment* via Skype, sharing the work she does in evangelical churches for LGBTI individuals with her wife Erika. It was during this time that attendees Daniel Perez, Eliel Cruz, and AJ Oetman, came up with the idea to record the young adults' responses to the question: "What message do you have for a Seventh-day Adventist LGBTI individual who is struggling with their identity?" As the excitement grew, plans were made to film these short two-minute video clips on the following day!

man, to discuss the future policies regarding LGBTI students on campus.

As for the other groups, they are slowly working to grow. Sydney Portela at Washington Adventist University has taken on the student group there, *Queers & Allies*, working to revive the students' interest in having the group. Summer Thrasher has been doing the same with *Students for Equality*, the group at Walla Walla University, but both have been facing resistance from administration, making it continually difficult. And the leaders of *GASP* at Pacific Union College have been mentoring future student leaders, as they continue to make plans on how to best work on campus and with administration.

On the second day of the Summit, the advisers gave their perspective on the student groups, how they felt things were going, and what possible improvements could be made. Dave Ferguson, the IAGC adviser from SDA Kinship International, also shared the work he has been doing—speaking with administration and faculty on each of the campuses, and sharing his brief conversations with many of the college and university presidents at the General Conference this year. Mischka Scott, who graduated from Southern Adventist University in May with a degree in social work and who now works with a Chattanooga-based HIV/AIDS awareness and support center, gave a presentation on LGBT sexual health. Although this is a very controversial topic with these students attending conservative Christian institutions, the demographic that the IAGC works with makes this a very important topic for the leaders to be familiar with, in order to address general questions that may be asked by members.



The Future IAGC

The 2015-2016 School Year

As a part of the IAGC Summit, the IAGC held its required annual business meeting, where our officers for the coming school year were elected. It was decided, before these elections were made, to amend the IAGC Constitution and By-laws to allow recent alumni to hold officer positions from this point on (in addition to current students), as they are able to dedicate more time to the organization than individuals who are balancing school and leading the GSA on their campus as well. Therefore, the following individuals were unanimously elected:

- * President - Jefferson Clark
- * Vice President - Jonathan Doram
- * Spiritual Vice President - Sarah Ventura
- * Treasurer - Daniel Perez
- * Secretary - Mischka Scott

With a renewed energy to continue this work, the IAGC will be making a diligent effort to heighten awareness-building methods. The following areas are receiving an overhaul in order to better the organization, and thus, the work that the IAGC does:

- * Student groups - to continue working on campuses where there is not a GSA.

If you would like to receive e-mail notice of our events, projects or activities, you can contact us at this link: <http://eepurl.com/buOY7D>

⌘ Send your comments about this article to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ⌘



Parent-reported measures of child health and wellbeing in same-sex parent families: a cross-sectional survey

By Simon R Crouch, Elizabeth Waters, Ruth McNair, Jennifer Power, and Elise Davis
Corresponding author: Simon R Crouch simonrcrouch@gmail.com

BMC Public Health 2014, 14:635 doi:10.1186/1471-2458-14-635

Published: 21 June 2014

Abstract

Background

It has been suggested that children with same-sex attracted parents score well in psychosocial aspects of their health, however questions remain about the impact of stigma on these children. Research to date has focused on lesbian parents and has been limited by small sample sizes. This study aims to describe the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of Australian children with same-sex attracted parents, and the impact that stigma has on them.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey, the Australian Study of Child Health in Same-Sex Families, was distributed in 2012 to a convenience sample of 390 parents from Australia who self-identified as same-sex attracted and had children aged 0-17 years. Parent-reported, multi-

dimensional measures of child health and wellbeing and the relationship to perceived stigma were measured.

Results

315 parents completed the survey (completion rate = 81%) representing 500 children. 80% of children had a female index parent while 18% had a male index parent. Children in same-sex parent families had higher scores on measures of general behavior, general health and family cohesion compared to population normative data ($\beta = 2.93$, 95% CI = 0.35 to 5.52, $P = .03$; $\beta = 5.60$, 95% CI = 2.69 to 8.52, $P < .001$; and $\beta = 6.01$, 95% CI = 2.84 to 9.17, $P < .001$ respectively).

There were no significant differences between the two groups for all other scale scores. Physical activity, mental health, and family cohesion were all nega-

tively associated with increased stigma ($\beta = -3.03$, 95% CI = -5.86 to -0.21, $P = .04$; $\beta = 10.45$, 95% CI = -18.48 to -2.42, $P = .01$; and $\beta = -9.82$, 95% CI = -17.86 to -1.78, $P = .02$ respectively) and the presence of emotional symptoms was positively associated with increased stigma ($\beta = 0.94$, 95% CI = 0.08 to 1.81, $P = .03$).

Conclusions

Australian children with same-sex attracted parents score higher than population samples on a number of parent-reported measures of child health. Perceived stigma is negatively associated with mental health. Through improved awareness of stigma these findings play an important role in health policy, improving child health outcomes.

✂ Send your comments about this article to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ✂



No matter how the polls frame it, U.S. public support for same-sex marriage is rising dramatically

Los Angeles, June 16, 2015

Contact: Lauren Jow, jow@law.ucla.edu, 310-206-0314



A majority of people in the United States support marriage equality, regardless of how various polls frame the question, according to a new report by Andrew R. Flores, public opinion and policy fellow at the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, that was published in *Public Opinion Quarterly*. The report, titled “*Examining Variation in Surveying Attitudes about Same-Sex Marriage: A Meta-Analysis*,” found that people respond differently when asked about the issue of “same-

sex marriage” versus allowing “gays and lesbians to marry legally.” The former garners less support than the latter, lowering the average level of support by 2.9 percentage points.

Even so, the trend clearly shows a majority of Americans in support, even after accounting for the different ways pollsters ask people about their opinions.

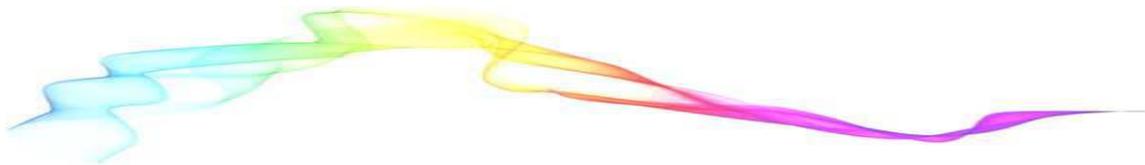
The report analyzed 138 polls with 36 different question wordings from 21 polling organizations. The earliest survey is from 1996, and the latest from 2014. Support has more than doubled in this timeframe, and is not the result of any single pollster or question wording.



To read the full report: <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/marriage-and-couples-rights/examining-variation-in-surveying-attitudes-on-same-sex-marriage-a-meta-analysis/>

See more at: <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/press-releases/no-matter-how-the-polls-frame-it-u-s-public-support-for-same-sex-marriage-is-rising-dramatically/#sthash.F5kI3611.dpuf>

⌘ Send your comments about this article to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ⌘



Being a Two-mother Family



Grace, Jill, Faith and Sherri

By Jill and Sherri Babcock

T*his article is based on an interview with Jill and Sherri, who were asked to share the gifts and challenges they have faced as a lesbian couple, raising their two children.*

Jill – Our local lesbian community and other lesbian friends gave us support. Because of them we were able to research a variety of conception options. We have an ongoing helpful network that gives us care and tips for whatever comes up for us on this parenting journey. Our kids can all talk to one another. When Grace’s friend, Gabi, shared with Grace how her Spanish teacher insisted on a genetic family tree for both sides of her family, Grace provided support and understanding. Grace then watched when her teacher assignments came out the next fall and was happy to find that she had been assigned to a different Spanish teacher who was more inclusive of alternate family structures. Having a network to support our kids as they confront situations like Gabi’s Spanish assignment comforts us. Our girls will never be isolated.

Sherri – I was a very reluctant parent, partially because I was sexually abused as a child, and feared the responsibility for someone so vulnerable. However, once I stepped into the role of mother, people—including my brother—noticed I was able to be much more loving. Parenting unlocked a part of my heart I would have never have exposed in the past.

Jill – I also noticed this about Sherri. She became more compassionate.

Sherri – Having a child retriggered all my pre-teen abuse memories. I would find myself crying

in the fetal position. I would watch my daughter get to a specific age and think, “How could someone do that to a vulnerable being who was six months, three years, or eight years old?”

Jill – One of the difficulties for me was physical. Parenting is physically difficult. I was sleep-deprived, up to all hours of the night nursing. One of Gabi’s mothers was a help, a friend and a listener. I appreciated having other lesbian mothers who understood some of our specific issues. We can share and understand stories—like the time our children outed us at a grocery store.

Sherri – I learned how much I have in common with straight men. I learned empathy for them. As a new mom, Jill was so busy with Grace or Faith that she didn’t want her body touched. When she did, it belonged to the baby. Women don’t often understand what it is like for straight men who are new parents and how much they miss their spouses’ attention. I do. Being a parent also gave me a greater appreciation of the Biblical stories where a parent gave up a favorite child. My children have stolen my heart and I cannot imagine parting with them.

Both Jill and Sherri – Our daughters struggle with the concept of Father God. They can relate to a parent God. Because they have grandfathers, uncles, and pastors they may see God through a variety of relational lenses.

It is hard for us when Grace or Faith are treated poorly by peers and other adults. It breaks my heart when someone says to them, “Your parents are going to hell.”

There was a kid at school who said, “Faith, don’t hug your friend so long; that’s like a lesbian.” The teacher said, “You don’t know what you are talking about.” Faith said, “You don’t know who you are talking to.” When we heard what Faith said, we told her she was “Right on!” One of the good things about these interactions is that our girls are developing skills to stand up for themselves that will stay with them all of their lives.

Jill – The first couple of years Grace was in church school she got bullied by a little girl whose parents told her that we are an abomination and cannot be saved. This little girl tried to drown Grace, hit her, and threatened to bring a knife to school and kill her. After talking to the teacher several times, I finally called the principal and told him this behavior is in violation of the student handbook and it needs to stop now! Things got better. I find that Adventist schools have archaic anti-bullying training. The enforcement procedures are meaningless until parents stand up. When Grace got to the public school I was impressed with the finely tuned anti-bullying protocols.

I foresee challenges that will arise as Faith develops her feminine wardrobe. Neither one of her mothers are style-conscious. We encourage her to find role models; thankfully, our school principal is a good one.

I imagine that when Grace or Faith is ready for the prom we are going to need to reach out to all the straight women, lesbians, and gay men in our lives who have a taste for style. There is not a

chance I would find and assemble the appropriate and desired components.

Sherri – When Jill got pregnant with Faith we ran into people in the church who had assumed we were sisters. One of the men in our potluck group asked “So how did you come to be pregnant?” The kitchen went quiet. I said, “We used artificial insemination.” Our general policy is wait until people ask and then just be direct. This disturbed the questioner. It turns out he was uncomfortable with homosexuality because he had been given a home by a couple of gay guys...who then solicited him.

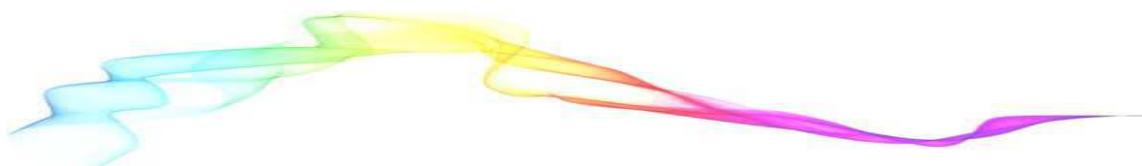
Jill and Sherri – The only other challenge that comes to mind is that Grace had difficulty in middle school social settings telling others that she has two mothers. She finally told her lunch mates and was surprised that they were very affirming. Earlier in the year she didn’t even want us to appear at the bus stop simultaneously. Since each of us was responsible for one of our children who needed to be near the bus stop we told her it didn’t work with our schedule and we couldn’t accommodate her sensibility.

Our congregation has been very good about letting us know when the NAD-directed topic of homosexuality is going to be discussed in Sabbath school. Teachers there adjust their rhetoric. They tell the Sabbath School class, “We cannot judge,” and they do not condemn us in front of our children. This is a beautiful thing and we appreciate it.

Jill Babcock is a licensed independent clinical social worker.

Sherri Babcock is a mechanical engineer and president of her own company.

⌘ Send your comments about this article to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ⌘

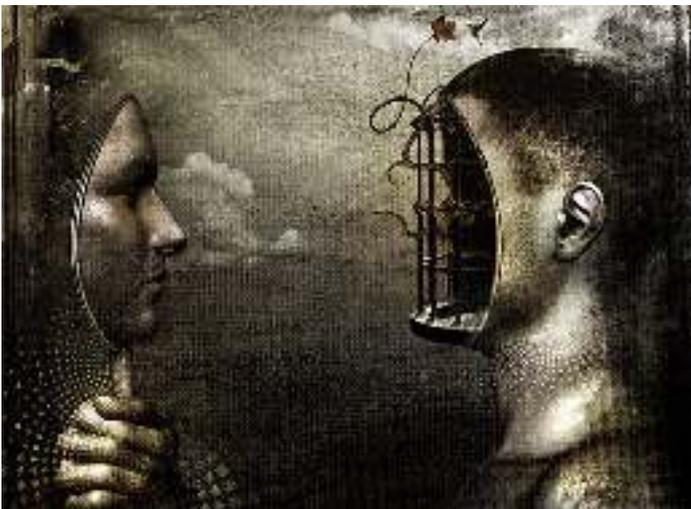




Journey (Part Four)

By Jerry McKay

Earlier, I mentioned my roommate Kelvin, and that we were roommates for almost four years. Speaking generally about our friendship, Kelvin said that, “from the start at Kingsway I never thought of you as being anything but a regular guy. I admired your spiritual status on campus and felt honored that you would consider rooming with me, an underclassman. I will always be grateful for that and recall many pleasant memories of our times together. We enjoyed similar activities and friendships.”



Awareness of Orientation during High School

Then he asked this question. “Did you ever feel sexually attracted to me or other guys we were friendly with? I certainly never suspected it.”

His question is a perfect segue into those moments when I was aware of my attraction to the same sex.

While the short answer to Kelvin’s question is, yes, most definitely, I was attracted to him. I felt different things for different people, and I wasn’t attracted to every guy just as no heterosexual is

attracted to every person of the opposite-sex.

It is important to understand that although I write as if I were fully aware of my orientation the truth is I was not that aware of the extent of my attractions and how they affected me. To use a common phrase, I was not out to myself. By that I mean I had not consciously named what I was experiencing. Throughout high school, for sure, and on into college, I never defined myself as homosexual or gay. I would not name my experi-

ence for another ten years. I did not do so for at least two reasons.

First, I lacked the vocabulary needed to say anything to anyone. The only language references I had were Biblical. From the Old Testament, I had terms like abomination and sodomite. From the New Testament, I knew what Paul seemed to say about those people in his letter to the church in Rome—they were people with dishonorable passions, and unnatural desires. While I had feelings that seemed to fit Paul’s description, I don’t remember thinking I was one of those people. The text did trouble me a lot, however.

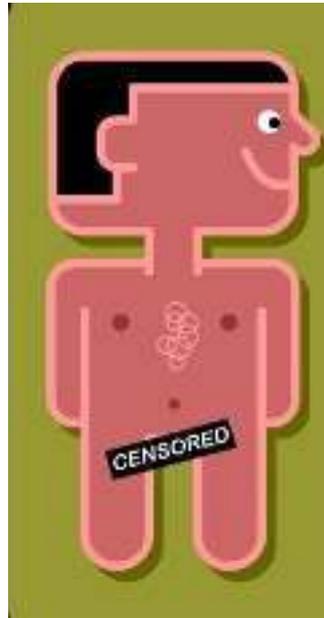
This lack of vocabulary was compounded by the fact that there was nothing about my world that was set up to help me name what I was experiencing. There was no gay-straight alliance group on campus, no stated policy by the school counsellor or nurse that acknowledged the existence of LGBT people and their concerns, and no internet for any personal research. If there was anything in print, it was hidden away in reference books in the library. Preachers never even talked about the subject in the early 70s.

I have no idea what would have happened had I confided in a dean, a teacher, or the pastor. I expect there were some understanding faculty on campus, but I had no idea who they might have been. Talking to someone would have broken my sense of isolation, but based on the experience of others, I would probably have been shamed into silence and or requested to withdraw from school. Had that happened, I would have been devastated. Instead, I lived my moments of awareness in isolation.

Despite this vague sense of awareness, I remember what I felt and how it affected me. Sometimes my attraction was subtle and more like background noise—always there but manageable. Other times, it led me to modify my behavior in subconscious ways. On other occasions, it broke into my awareness and overwhelmed me.

My first example of awareness reflects the subconscious tension I felt about being physically attracted to roommates like Kelvin and others in the dormitory and how I changed my behavior because of it.

Living at a boarding school, even a Christian school, had its challenges for someone physically attracted to the same sex—those community showers.



Most modern campus residences are similar to hotel suites where two or maybe four people share a bathroom with some semblance of privacy. The showers at Kingsway, however, were rather public—too public, for me.

The showers I remember most were not large and open with multiple places to bathe, but small and intimate. There was one

entrance into a small ceramic room that had just two shower heads. When there was a curtain, it was not there as a divider between the two occupants. It simply closed off the small entrance to prevent water from spilling out onto the main floor.

As often as I could, I headed to the showers earlier than necessary hoping to get in and out before others arrived. Although I was bashful, that wasn’t the primary reason for hitting the showers early. I did not want to deal with the distress created by my appreciation of the male body.

I think most guys, Christian or not, would feel awkward if they had to shower with their female friends. If they did peek, they might feel guilty but normal. Even if I wanted to peek, I felt ashamed and abnormal.

I must emphasize that I wasn’t necessarily thinking about what was below the belt. Nor was I thinking about doing anything. I was distressed because, in my eyes, the male body was appealing and I wanted to look at it.

When a friend or roommate, for whom I had a spiritual and emotional attraction, was naked and within arm’s reach, the distress was exhausting. Believe me, it is only when you try not to peek that you realize how much you can see with good peripheral vision!

Living in a dorm meant there were plenty of guys roaming about clad only in a towel. This, too, was stressful. Every time I was met by a friend in his briefs, I was afraid my gaze would be different in some way—a few seconds longer than normal or in a way that betrayed my secret. I’m

eternally grateful that Kelvin was not an exhibitionist!

Despite those everyday occurrences, I welcomed my male friendships, but I was always overly cautious about avoiding any physical contact shying away from hugs or simple touch of any kind. The odd unexpected touch on my back or shoulder, though pleasant, was electrifying and made me anxious.

On the other hand, I never minded the fact that activities like assemblies and church services were segregated—the girls had to sit on the left, and the guys had to sit on the right. Being required to sit snugly between male friends in church was a cross I bore willingly. Unlike my classmates, I never did dream of the day when I would be in the upper grades and therefore have the privilege of sitting with female friends.

My next example illustrates how emotionally attached I could be to classmates, roommates and friends and yet be very much out of touch with those feelings until some event pushed them to the surface.

Within hours of returning to school one year after Christmas break, I learned some news that jolted me emotionally.

Del was one of the spiritual role models on campus, and I admired him. He was articulate, intelligent, and dynamic. He was also attractive. He often led Bible study groups and prayer circles in the dorm. He had been dating one of the girls on campus. I had been okay with that, or at least I thought I was, until he announced that they had got engaged over the holidays.

My reaction betrayed my true feelings. Although I was able to put on a happy congratulatory face, I remember being overwhelmed with emotions. I hated that I felt anger, jealousy and even bitterness. Mixed in with those emotions were feelings of grief and loss. In retrospect, I know I had feelings for Del.

This experience would repeat itself a number of times with respect to other friends.

Many people feel a sense of loss when a close friend or family member announces an engagement. When that happens, we know the dynamics of the relationship will change, and we eventually accept the new reality. Most people have someone to talk to about it.

I, however, experienced a wound I could not talk about. I had feelings I could never have

expressed verbally let alone acted on. I had no one to share my feelings with. The only thing I could do was stuff them deep inside.

Constantly experiencing strong emotions and denying them takes a toll. The toll for me was the slow numbing and shutting down of emotion.



My third example was a one-time event and had to do with beauty in the eyes of the heterosexual beholder.

One evening after the mandatory study period was over; a group of us younger guys were hanging out in an older guy's room. Not surprisingly, the subject of women came up. The older student unquestionably loved everything about women. You could tell he had given much previous thought to what he was going to say because his eyes widened with enthusiasm as he elaborated on why he found women so physically attractive.

“A woman,” he said, “possesses a layer of subcutaneous fat that softens her body to both sight and touch.” This, he emphasized, was in contrast to the sinews and muscles visible on the male body. The implication was that the male body was not appealing.

The comment caught me off guard and made me very uncomfortable.

Instantly, the situation triggered that familiar fear response. It was as if someone had punched me in the gut. I could feel anxiety move through my body. In his comment and my reaction, I was reminded again of what I was supposed to be thinking and feeling. I did not feel the way Perry did, and I knew it.

Perry's comment startled me so forcefully for another reason. It made me aware of what I had actually been doing while he was speaking. I had been observing every sinew and muscle of his body

as he sat there in his armchair wearing only his briefs!

It would have been healthier, for me, if I could have talked and joked about what I was thinking. Instead, I repressed what I was feeling. Even worse, I felt compelled to lie about my truth. Although I was in a state of panic, I made a pathetic attempt to show knowing agreement.

I returned to my room with my mind overrun with those why questions. They were not just questions about why I felt drawn to guys. I was plagued over why I felt no physical attraction for any of my female friends. There was never an end to wondering what was wrong with me.

This is a critical point. I was not heterosexual as is typically understood plus one oddity. I was not attracted to women and also interested in men. I had no attraction to women. This was so troubling because I knew I had not chosen to reject women in some fist-in-the-air act of rebellion against God in exchange for the unnatural. I was not exercising a preference I could turn on or off.

I said my prayers and went to bed hoping things would change, but the next morning everything was the same. The energy I used to manage, repress and lie was so tiring.

With all of these details about my devotional habits and distress over my orientation as background, you can see how intrigued I was by another of Kelvin's observations. Although I had often seen Kelvin pray, I would never have said of him, "I remember wondering what was going through your head when you would spend long periods kneeling by the radiator at the window, apparently praying." Then he added, "I thought in subsequent years that you were possibly trying to figure yourself out."

Kelvin had no idea how accurate his wonderings were.



My final example of sexual awareness and accompanying distress revolved around a summer job. I had two summer jobs between

the time I enrolled at Kingsway and my graduation in 1974. One of those involved evangelistic endeavors. The job in question illustrated what it might be like trying to work in church ministry and cope with same-sex attraction.

As part of a church sponsored student work program, I joined a two-person team that went to help a local church with its evangelistic activities. As it turned out, I was teamed up with one of my camp counsellors from years back. This time, Don was around 20 and as attractive as ever. I was about to turn 17.

A local family provided us with room and board. We spent every day together driving around Bellville in an old black and white van full of Bibles, Bible study guides, and evangelistic literature. We helped the local pastor with church services, carried the weight of that summer's Vacation Bible School, and went door to door signing people up for Bible studies. It was a rewarding summer, and it was my introduction to what a pastor's life might actually look like.

The only constant downside was my orientation. It was exhausting showing up at someone's door for a Bible study or trying to lead out in a church service with the image of a tanned shirtless construction worker filling my thoughts. There was construction going on all over Bellville that summer, and those guys didn't have an ounce of subcutaneous fat on their bodies.

Those why questions drained my energy and detracted from my work.

While Don may have had visions of a scantily clad woman on his mind, I doubt he beat himself up because of them. If he did have twinges of guilt, I'm sure he never thought of himself as an abomination or a sodomite. I doubt he went to bed weary from a tyranny of whys plaguing him. If he had had a few lust-filled thoughts, at least, his were natural.

I am also sure Don did not end his day distressed because he had found me attractive in the way I found him attractive. Like other friends and classmates at Kingsway, Don was attractive not just physically but spiritually. This combination made my feelings of appeal and guilt more potent. As always, I suppressed, denied, and prayed in silence.

For a moment of comic relief, I want to share a bit from one of my other summer jobs.

That summer, I attempted to sell religious and health related magazines door to door. That experiment did not last long. I hated it. First, I despised our uniforms.

Being Canadian we dressed in our colors—red and white. Every day we headed out in our red shirts, white ties and white polyester pants, or skirts, depending on your gender. Those colors would have worked for a gymnastic team, but not for walking the streets of Ottawa. I felt as self-conscious as a dog that had just had its coat



And Then There Was Dating

In addition to all the same-sex attraction stuff going on, I did date during high school. Although my dating may have outwardly resembled that of my heterosexual counterparts, I know I never felt much like they did.

Another of Kelvin’s observations confirmed what others saw me doing. Regarding my social life, he wrote, “I remember wondering why you were liked by quite a few girls but you seemed unable to get too close to them.”

He specifically remembered two of my “girlfriends”—the only two, in fact, that I remember. We apparently shared a common interest, because he said he was especially surprised “when I broke up with Beverly at a time when he thought she still wanted to be my girlfriend and he, in fact, had a secret desire for her to be his!”

Regarding my other girlfriend, he noted that Donna and I were “always good friends but never a ‘couple’.”

For most of one year, I “dated” Beverly in what should be described as “in form only.”

I don’t remember how we started to date. I think it was just the natural outflow of circumstances and expectations. Most were dating or trying to date in one way or the other.

sheered too short. That wasn’t the real reason for abandoning that job, however.

No matter how informative those magazines were or how much the team leader tried to encourage me to continue in “the Lord’s work,” I knew I would rather pile lumber than try to convince people to buy magazines. That summer I learned I was not a salesman. I quit and headed back to Kingsway to work in the furniture factory for the remainder of the summer.

Beverley was a grade ahead of me, but we were a part of the same circle of friends. She was shy and beautiful and kind. She was also a talented pianist. Of course, she was spiritual. Throughout one year we went to those after-sunset Saturday night activities—skating, movie night and concerts. Like the others who were dating, we exchanged letters on ‘letter night’—the night approved for runners to shuttle letters between the dorms.

Once, probably twice, we went as a couple to the big social events of the year—Open House and Reception. Each event included a formal dinner with suits and gowns and corsages. I still have the photos!

Although there was nothing obligatory about holding your date’s hand as you escorted her to and from dinner, there was an understanding that such a display of affection might occur. On those special evenings, I did hold Beverly’s hand, but that was the extent of our intimacy. I never struggled with wanting more.

For one summer, we wrote back and forth sharing our day to day activities, but again that was it. Not that there needed to be anything steamy going on between two high school students at a Christian boarding school, but there really was little about our relationship that could have been

considered more than platonic—at least from my perspective.

I don't remember when or why *I* ended the dating relationship. It clearly took everyone, included Kelvin, by surprise. I suspect I was just tapping into something deep inside of me that knew it had to end because I wasn't going to be able to move it forward in any meaningful way.

My relationship/friendship with Donna was more complicated.

Our on-again off-again friendship would last for years and went beyond high school through college and included mission service together. Sometimes it seemed we were dating and at other times we behaved more like friends. We shared theological and spiritual interests and a love of nature. We had the kind of deep conversations that only soul mates can have.

Compared to Donna, I was the dim bulb. I had to work hard for my grades while she breezed through most classes with minimal effort. During exams, I always needed the full two hours allotted to finish the test, while Donna would pack up and leave the room after an hour.

The first time that happened, I assumed she didn't do very well, and I felt sorry for her. In fact, she scored higher than I did. That experience repeated itself every semester.

We were in the band together, as well. She played the flute. When visiting small churches we occasionally accommodated a request for special music. I am positive we were the only trombone flute duet anyone had ever heard. Somehow, we made it work.

Donna and I attended at least one of those elaborate yearly social events as a couple, and I did hold her hand on those evenings. We spent a great deal of time alone, but again, nothing intimate ever happened, because I never initiated anything. I never struggled with any vow of chastity. There were no desires or urges to struggle over.

Ironically, the absence of any sexual urges on my part only heightened the respect I had in the eyes of many, and of course, no Christian girl wanted to be the one to lead me into temptation. I know I confused Donna, because I was definitely confused, and we confused everyone around us. I have more to say about Donna later.

A few final thoughts as I bring this part of my life to a close.

Because people saw me going through the motions of dating, they rightly assumed I shared at least some of their passions. There was something ironic about being known to have a deep faith and an even stronger control over earthly desires. If friends had only known that my orientation was the force behind my control, they might have felt better about their struggles, and I would have felt more honest and authentic. Having godlike control over my urges, however, meant that male friends used to confide in me about their relationship problems and urges.

I often heard about “the kiss” that took place earlier in the evening and the guilt about wanting more. I watched friends open their love letters, and shared their excitement about being in love. Later, I consoled them when their relationships ended. On the rare occasion, I was approached by a troubled and timid soul who wanted me to share my thoughts on the subject of masturbation. The query usually implied he struggled with the vice but had no one to talk to.

I guess I seemed like a safe and understanding person to go to. I always tried to listen and counsel with compassion. All the while, I was strangely silent about anything that was going on in my heart and veins. Editing out the important stuff of life became my norm. Only the experienced observer would have picked up on that. Although I was able to manage the tension, it was not easy; and clearly some wondered about me but couldn't put a finger on what I was about.

My high school years rank near the top of enjoyable periods of my life. Friendships developed that have continued to this day, and those friendships made up for much of the void my orientation created at the time. I graduated from high school in the spring of 1974 and started my Bachelor in Theology the following September while still at Kingsway. During my first year of college, I made a decision that would significantly impact the next six years. While trying to finish my degree in theology, I would crisscross the Pacific three times as a student missionary in Japan.

Before moving on to Japan and my second year in college, I want to digress and look at two published sources that created a lot of angst, affected my self-image, and set me up for future difficulties. One source was in the Bible—the first chapter of Romans—and the second was the Adventist publication *You and Your Health*.

To be continued

✂ Send your comments about this article to editor@buildingsafeplaces.org ✂

We Are Seventh-day Adventists: Every Story Matters

Who are we? Hear our stories. <http://www.wearesdas.com/#/whoarewe/>

