**A.J.'s Story**

A young person's journey to find a church that fills both spiritual and social needs

When I became a Christian in 1994, my life was turned upside down. I lived a more fruitful and abundant life, in that I had more joy, my soul was finally at peace, and now for the first time, I felt safe. When adversity came, it did not seem daunting, and surely not as stressful. When my mom went, it just completed our family. My mom had been praying for a mate that would love her for her, and me for me, not knowing the master. When God had his way, Theresa, my stepmother, was at the same time praying for a woman and child, knowing her sexuality. Unbeknownst to any of us, we were all looking for the same thing. I can truly say that it was of divine appointment (meant by God) for our family's construction.

As a family who was obviously different, and living in Houston, Texas, we did not know how to go about finding a church that was GLBT-affirming and one that would also suit our needs. To my amazement, we found our solace at Maranatha Fellowship Metropolitan Community Church, a local fellowship of Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC). UFMC was founded by Troy Perry in 1968, addressing the needs of GLBT individuals around the country and the world. Each denomination is different, often reflecting the background of the persons or pastor in the church. Maranatha is a charismatic church, and has helped me grow in various forms of my spiritual walk. It has helped continued on page 10

**Differences**

by Eliza Torigy

I look at my life of 23 years as though it were made up of three different lives. One third is still developing, it is now and included the time I've lived on my own, outside of my family home. Before this, there was high school and junior high in my father's home where I lived with his influences and under his guidance. However, for my elementary school years I lived with my mom. Those are the memories I remember as being filled with excitement, freedom, and embarrassment. I was always excluding my mother to other people for her quirks ways. She was, the most unusual person in my life.

My mother worked odd jobs like gardening, helping dump loads, writing poetry, and many other things, she found that followed her interests. She had female lovers in our suburb, middle-American home. However, one of her greatest differences from other kids' moms were her beliefs in the Goddess and her spiritual connection with the world (see page 10).

**Growing Up in the Mormon Church**

by Sara

My name is Sara and I was raised by my biological mother and her partner of 20 years. I am now living in Utah where I attend college. I was raised in the Mormon Church. My moms took me to church every Sunday and made sure that God and religion played a big role in my life. And it did. Unfortunately, being gay and being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints can be a huge challenge. My brother and I never talked about our home life with anyone but each other. We came from a very loving, gentle, fun-filled family. However, we could not let people know who we came from such a "special" family. That was really hard at school, in Girl Scout, and especially at Church. It was either deny (on our part) or just that we wanted to protect our parents, but we never shared our family secret. Now it is much more common, and we are both older, but we have come from a very confusing place.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is a Christian church and it believes in the King James version of the Holy Bible and The Book of Mormon continues on page 10.

**Inside Special Features**

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

Happy Spring! As we relax into warmer days and longer nights, I hope you enjoy this issue of Just For Us. Religion and spirituality are an integral part of many of our lives. These pages contain many different explorations of how religion and spirituality have intersected with our concepts of family, influenced our beliefs about right and wrong, and acted as either a barrier or a lifesaver throughout our lives. I know I have found the theme of this issue personally relevant. This Spring I prepare to complete my conversion to Judaism, the culmination of a spiritual journey of many years. We are very sorry that it has been a while since you last received an issue of Just For Us. Like so many not-for-profit organizations, COLAGE’s budget and therefore programs have been hurt by the recession and by the events of Sept. 11. These tough financial times, COLAGE has been forced to make some difficult decisions regarding our services, including our newsletter circulation policy. For many years, COLAGE has sent Just For Us to families regardless of their giving history. Except in cases of financial hardship, we can no longer continue this practice.

The enclosed letter describes how you can continue to receive Just For Us by making a modest yearly contribution. We hope that you will be able to contribute whatever you can afford to support not only this one-of-a-kind publication, but all of the vital services of COLAGE by and for people with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender parents. This Spring brings several exciting and positive developments for COLAGE as well. The newest addition to the COLAGE staff is the fabulous Beth Teper. Many of you already know Beth from her seven years of service on COLAGE’s Board of Directors/Steering Committee. Please welcome her into her new role as Program Associate. (See p. 15 for more on Beth.)

Lastly, I have some wonderful personal news to share: my partner Rachel and I are expecting our own little bundle of joy on August 2. So far I have had a smooth and healthy pregnancy, in no small part due to the amazing support and love we have received from you, the COLAGE community. Thank you! Please keep sending it our way as we move into the new territory of parenthood. While I am away on parental leave mid-July to mid-November, an interim executive director will serve in my place.

I hope the various viewpoints and spiritual journeys conveyed in this issue of Just For Us provide as much food for thought for you as they have for me. Please feel free to contact COLAGE with your thoughts and impressions.

With wishes for good health, happiness, peace, and justice for all,

Felicia Park-Rogers
Executive Director

Felicia Park-Rogers
Program Associate
Beth Teper
Newsletter: Rosanne Johnson
Newsletter Design: Ann Fishkin
Board of Directors:
Chair: Meredith Finton
San Francisco
Treasurer: Myke Goishi, Berkeley, CA
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MA
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Kate Kovalvanka, Takoma Park, MD
Orson Morrison, Michigan
Diane Paulson, Oak Ridge, NJ
Kate Ranson-Wolfe, Reston, VA
Dana Silver, Bethesda, MD
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FAMILY WEEK 2002

The ever-popular Family Week is back! Join hundreds of people in LGBT families for socializing and support. This is a life-changing experience for everyone that participates. Register now to attend Family Week in Saugatuck, MI July 6-13, 2002 and in Provincetown, MA August 3-10, 2002. COLAGE will organize recreational and support activities for kids ages 9-12 and 13 and older during both weeks. If you are interested in volunteering on the planning committee or during the week, please contact Felicia, exec@colage.org. For registration forms go to www.familypride.org. You must pre-register!

COLAGE... (Children Of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere) is a nonprofit organization providing support, education, and advocacy for people of all ages of LGBT parents.

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SPEAK OUT

COLAGE’s two on-line discussion groups, people with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender parents are discussing the challenging issues that affect their lives. Here are some recent insights from people on the M and over list, addressing our strategies in reconciling our religious and spiritual beliefs with our parent’s sexual orientations.

My suggestion is, believe what your heart tells you. God loves us all, no matter what. That’s what I believe. And the people who preach against homosexuals, they are just scared of people who are different. And trying to use God against us. Here is a scripture that I have on my signature, because it’s such a good one. “Jesus said, ‘By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”’ (John 13:35 - Nichki, 15, Wisconsin)

I did struggle with this at one point, but then I realized that spirituality comes from me and not a religion. I totally believe in God, and I feel that I am incredibly spiritual. I don’t do church, and I have no religious affiliations. I was watching the movie “Stomp the Plane,” a really awesome movie... and toward the end they say these lines and it really represents exactly how I feel about God and spirituality. “The kingdom of god is inside you and goes across you. Not in a mansion of brick or stone. Spill a piece of wood and I am there. Lift a stone and you will find me.” (Gospel of Thomas, sayings 3-77) - Diane, 17, New Jersey

I completely understand the feeling of a lack of spirituality. I used to belong to the United Methodist Church and the lady there told me to church with the goal of saying for God’s forgiveness for my mother. At the age of five, I really don’t understand that your family is any different. About seven years ago, I found a lock back on religion and that memory popped into my mind. I realized what that meant and it disturbed me so much that I decided to adopt an atheist lifestyle. Then my mom began to attend church. It wasn’t Unitarian, but it adopted many of the same philosophies, among those love and acceptance for every being. It was actually a really great experience for me and somewhat allowed me to renew my faith in a higher power. I don’t exactly believe in God per se, but I do believe that there is an entity that has some say in one’s life. - Lexi, 20, Virginia

For more information or to join the kids of LGBT families, write or email us under the same heading, over to, go to http://www.colage.org and click on “email lists”.

Want to share your opinion on this topic? Get a suggestion for a future SpeakOut question? Contact Just For Us Coordinator Rosanne Johnson via email at JFUS@colage.org.

CHAPTER UPDATE

These are exciting times for the Seattle/Puget Sound COLAGEx chapter. Robert Rakley joined the program in October and has since worked hard to revitalize it. He comes to COLAGE with lots of social service experience working with youth. In January he hosted a COLAGE open house that was a huge success and brought many new families to COLAGE. They had door prizes, pizza and lots of fun! Robert has been doing outreach at community events and at meetings. The youth have also done panels to talk about their families. As a result the group continues to grow. Robert is also working with like-minded organizations to do media education about gay families and there are plans to form a coalition. Already, COLAGE has been featured in the Seattle Gay News and the Capital Hill Times.

The group is planning lots of fun activities in the coming months. They plan to go bowling, bowling and to the local water park (since the weather improves). Recently they went to a Seattle Music Chorus concert and have plans to do it again soon.

To get involved with the Seattle/Puget Sound-ers, call Robert at 206-444-8780 or email him at robert@PitstoneWellness.org.

COLAGE and COLAGEx in the Media

In February and March 2002, COLAGE and COLAGEx were seen in and heard on these and other media outlets, helping to increase public understanding and to lead toward changes in unjust and discriminatory laws and policies regarding our families.


The opinions expressed in Just For Us are those of its contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of COLAGE.
LEE DUBIN SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

The Lee Dubin Scholarship fund was created to acknowledge and support daughters and sons of LGBT parents in their efforts to combat homophobia and advocate for LGBT rights. Each year, COLAGE and Family Pride Coalition award scholarships to college students who demonstrate their ability in and commitment to affecting change in the community.

ANDREA GIBBS
Raised in a very liberal household, Andrea is a very liberal liberal. She attributes her deep roundabout activism to her two lesbian parents. Andrea is the full-time volunteer caretaker of Camp Sister Spirit, which was co-founded by one of her mothers. Located in Mississippi, Camp Sister Spirit is the only feminist education retreat center in the South. As the Educational Program Coordinator of the camp, Andrea facilitates educational programs on issues including racism, paganism, religious oppression, feminist issues, homophobia and human rights. A senior at the University of Southern Mississippi, Andrea graduated in 2002 with a major in criminal justice and minors in Spanish and Women’s Studies. Her goal is to work towards a Masters degree in Adult Education, and to eventually work to end state prisons and with the economically disadvantaged. Among her many accomplishments, Andrea was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Law from the City University of New York to honor her work in civil rights.

JORDAN MASON
High school through college, Jordan strove to make an impact on the LGBTQ+ community in his hometown of Charlotteville, Virginia. He has two lesbian moms and a gay dad. He feels that being raised by lesbian moms has strongly influenced his feelings about diversity and gay rights. Although identifying as heterosexual, Jordan feels very much a part of the LGBTQ+ community, to which he is grateful for its support and acceptance throughout his life. Among many of his accomplishments during high school, Jordan served as a panelist in a workshop about the need for equal rights for the gay community called “Why Should Straight People Care?” at a regional conference called EarVoices for Equal Rights. Jordan plans to continue upholding his commitment to the LGBTQ+ community in college. He is currently a freshman at the University of Virginia, where he plans to major in Government and International Affairs and minor in Asian Studies.

MZIMA SCADEC
The daughter of a lesbian mom, Mzima Scadeng was very involved with COLAGE. In her last two years of high school, she has been a panelist at various events, has worked with COLAGE, and has been very involved with COLAGE’s work at the OHMY! (Overcoming Homophobia) Meeting for youth conference and has been very much in the know of what is happening with COLAGE and the LGBTQ+ community in the area. Mzima is currently a freshman at the University of New Hampshire, where she is majoring in women’s studies.

TARA SCHNERRER DE LA FUENTE
As the daughter of lesbian moms, Tara feels that she is a representative of other children brought up by GLBT parents. For a brief period, Tara attended Calvary Chapel Bible College in Austria. Although she found it difficult to express her liberal beliefs to a Christian community, she felt obligated to make them known. Tara says, “If the only reason I spent a portion of my life being a Christian was to be able to influence a group of Christian leaders in this small town, then it was well spent. I think my boldness is a part of who I am because of who my parents are. I am proud of my parents for knowing who they are and sharing themselves and their love with me and with the people in their lives.” Tara volunteered for several years at a n-kill animal shelter in Seal Beach, CA and publishes a zine of her own writing. She feels strongly about AIDS-related causes, and participated in the California AIDS Ride 4, riding her bicycle from San Francisco to Los Angeles and raising nearly $3000. She recently graduated from the Emerson College, with a major in Writing, Literature and Publishing and a minor in Sign Language.

ARIEL PEARSON-GETING
Socially aware and politically active, Ariel attributes her strong sense of herself and her community to her lesbian parents who surrounded her with positive women role models. In high school she proved to be a good leader and an asset to her team playing on the Kelley High Junior Varsity softball team, then as umpire for the Albany Berkeley Girls Softball League, extending her job there to help coach a team in the younger girls division of the league. As a member of her high school gay/strong Alliance Ariel helped create anti-homophobia workshops for both teachers and peers. She continued to challenge herself by taking college classes, and in the American Sign Language Department at Vista when she was a sophomore at Berkeley High School. She is currently a freshman at California State University Northridge, where she intends to major in Deaf Studies/Communication Sciences. “I want to concentrate on becoming an interpreter in a theatrical or musical environment.” Ariel hopes to one day interpret on stage at Gay Pride in San Francisco.

SPAWN TALK
Faith, Wisdom & Conditional Acceptance

I never really liked going to church. Right before I started junior high, I told my mom I didn’t want to go at all anymore. Mom told me that “the rule in our family” (as if it had been carved in stone centuries back) was that I was required to attend confirmation class and then make that decision. Since the end of eighth grade I would be mature enough to join the church, she told me. I would also be mature enough to join if I chose to. Eighth grade — and confirmation classes — finally came to an end and I honored my agreement, and after seven years of Sunday school and two years of confirmation classes, I made my educated decision to leave the church. It was not the first time — nor the last time — that raising a free-thinking, questioning daughter challenged my parents. You could say I rejected my church before my church had the chance to reject me. In confirmation class, the teachers ignored the “fag” jokes and diverted any conversations that veered toward open dialogue about homosexuality. It was bad enough facing homophobia in school. Why did I have to guard up at church too?

Profiles by Katie Brezinski, COLAGE volunteer

Next year’s scholarship applications will be available on the COLAGE website.

JOHNNY SYMONS
Reviewed by the Toronto COLAGEutcher

W hat if you could have anything you wanted in the world? Through the stories of four different families, "Daddy & Papa" dives into some of the particular challenges facing gay parents who decide to have children. The Toronto Star/Colageutcher, led by Sandy Parker and Sheri Arnetts, recently hosted a video night, featuring popcans, specially designed collector’s edition movie posters, and the video, "Daddy & Papa." Are's Sandy’s report:

Our group watched the movie last night. We had 18 people: kids, grandparents, 1-9, and some parents, including two Southern Mississippians who worked in 2002 with a major in film. The earth was pretty much the same for the kids, but they were all quiet and watched it the entire way through.

I asked three questions: 1) "What did you like about the movie?", 2) "What didn’t you like about the movie?", and 3) "Rate the movie out of 5 stars."

One thing was the same: everyone thought the movie was great. Overall, our group gave Daddy & Papa a "thumbs up"; they gave the movie an average of 3.75 stars. Some of their compliments:

"It showed that gay men could have kids too."
"It was family."
MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN
Youth Allies Speak up at Social Action Conference

Ruby Cymrot-Wu, Benjie Achterberg, Emma Buchholde, Julia Becker, and Annie Dowsen form the leadership program of Congregation Sh’aray Zehav in San Francisco. Each of them has at least one lesbian parent.

This February, accompanied by their rabbi and youth group leader, the Sh’aray Zehav youth group traveled to the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, DC to attend a L’Taken Seminar, an intensive four-day conference for high school students focused on Jewish values and social justice. There the teens studied local and international issues and learned how to lobby. On Monday, the Sh’aray Zehav group met with representatives of Bay Area Congregations Feinstein, Pelosi, Boxer, Lee and Lantos.

Looking over the list of educational workshop topics on current social and political issues, the teens’ Sh’aray Zehav youth group saw that there was to be no workshop on LGBT issues. They were told that there was no time and no presenters available this year.

“Speaking about that kind of stuff to that many people before. When it ended, we were all emotionally exhausted. It was just so amazing for all of us to just come out and say, ‘This is who we are, you can accept it or not.’”

The literal meaning of the Hebrew term L’Taken is “to fix or repair.” Congratulations to the Sh’aray Zehav youth for jumping in and doing just that by speaking up for all of our families! 

R E S O U R C E S
FINDING AN ACCEPTING AND AFFIRMING COMMUNITY

Within most of the major faith traditions, there are now liberal branches that are more accepting of LGBT people. Still, some congregations minister directly to the LGBT community. If this sounds like what you’re looking for, here are just a few select links to get you started. Most are national; all can help direct you to local resources.

Metropolitan Community Churches founded in 1968 specifically to meet the spiritual needs of Christian LGBT people. “All are welcome in MCC...We experience our communities of faith as places of healing and hope, places of reconciliation with family, with self-esteeem, and with individual spirituality.”

www.mcc.org

Unitarian Universalists - Jews “affirm and promote the worth, dignity, and human rights of every person.” A liberal, non-secret religion, UU embraces not only LGBT people but people of diverse backgrounds and belief systems.

www.usua.org

DignityUSA - “We worship openly with others. We provide a safe space and a forum for LGBT Muslims...as well as their families, friends, partners, and allies...to address issues of common concern...passionate and informed advocates...”

www.dignityusa.org

American Baptists Concerned provide support, education, and advocacy for LGBT Baptists, families, friends, churches, and clergy. “We seek to be a ray of hope (for those who have been caused much pain because of the misbelief that someone cannot be both Christian and gay)”

www.rainbowbaptists.org

Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons “serves the needs of gays, lesbians, bisexual LDS and their supportive family and friends through social and educational activities.”

www.affirmation.org

World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews - “Our vision is an environment where LGBT Jews worldwide can enjoy free and fulfilling lives.” Their website contains links to affirming congregations worldwide.

www.wcglbj.org

Al-Fatihah Foundation’s goals include “providing a safe space and a forum for LGBT Muslims...as well as their families, friends, partners, and allies... to address issues of common concern...”

www.al-fatihah.net

Buddhism, which is generally neutral on sexual orientation issues, is growing in popularity among LGBT people and allies. Boston’s Buddha Boston, www.buddhaboston.org has 7 satellite groups, including one in Provincetown.

Lutherans Concerned: www.lcusa.org

More Light Presbyterians - Presbyterian Church (USA): www.mp.org

Integrity - Episcopal: www.integrityusa.org


WHAT YOU CAN DO
Exploring & Expanding Your Own Spirituality

Involving Your Family & Friends

Every human being is born with an inherently spiritual nature. Most people express this nature and reflect upon it in their deepest questions from within their belief traditions or faiths. However, because of doctrine, custom, prejudice, or all of the above, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have often been rejected and excluded from faith communities. For many light people, and for those who love and support them, the very word “religion” is linked to memories of fear, persecution and condemnation. As a result, many of us struggle to find or create a spiritual path that allows us to be true to ourselves.

Drawing upon the wisdom of COLALeRs from across the country, the youth who participated in the spirituality workshop at Provincetown Family Week in 2001, Just For Us offers advice and resources designed especially for COLALeRs who experience internal and/or external conflict in their spiritual practice.

Hit the Books

We learn it from the pulpit, the TV, the classroom, our families and friends - our knowledge of faith and their beliefs about homosexuality comes from what we are taught by others. At the same time, nothing can replace the experience of studying, reflecting on, and coming to your own understanding of what the holy books, scriptures, and canons hold. Lots of other informative books are out there to help answer your questions about spirituality, with perspectives from conservative to radical to everything in between.

Find your Religion: When the Faith You Grew Up With Has Lost Its Meaning - an invaluable resource, demystifying the process of why and how people gravitate towards and away from faith traditions throughout their lives. www.FaithSearch.com

Finding Your Religion: When the Faith You Grew Up With Has Lost Its Meaning - an invaluable resource, demystifying the process of why and how people gravitate towards and away from faith traditions throughout their lives.


To let them know you’re there. Speak to your faith leaders and peers about your family and answer their questions. Your presence of worship might be full of potential allies.

Responding Respectfully

You may be challenged by those who seek to deny you and your family right to express your spirituality. Confrontations with people who use religion to attack gay people and allies can be frustrating and disheartening, particularly when you’re still wrestling with spirituality and sexual orientation issues yourself. You have the option to excuse yourself from any unwanted debate. Respect your right to your beliefs. Please respect my right to believe otherwise. is an example of a brief and dignified response to charged remarks about sex, sin, and h-debacle-hockey-sticks.

Expand Your Understanding

Not everyone practices the same faith throughout their entire lives. Many people experiment and follow different traditions at different times. Nor do you have to practice as an ‘established’ religion or any religion in order to live a peaceful and ethical life. Many people cultivate their own unique and meaningful connection to the divine, nature, and their fellow human beings.

Spirituality is a complex, deeply personal, lifelong journey. Some people find joy in sharing their spiritual lives with a community, while others prefer a solitary path. There are those who are comfortable in discussing their inner lives and those who treasure their privacy. Don’t rush...you have your whole life to discover what works for you. In the meantime, talk to God/Life/Spirit/God/Goddess/whatever and let the journey, you will always be in very good company.

R E S O U R C E S
FURTHER READING

What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality - one of a number of thought-provoking books that traverse the territory of re-interpreting some of the biblical depictions of same-sex intimacy, condemning homosexuality. Daniel A. Helminiak, Ph.D; Alamo Square Press, 1995.

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere

Support and activism by and for people with lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender parents.

Dear Friends,

Many of you have been receiving *Just For Us* for many years, some of you from its inception in 1990. In that time you’ve watched the publication grow and change. Once a bimonthly, it went biannual and then to twice a year. In 1997, *Just For Us* was a 16-page publication with sections for young kids, older kids, and two generation folks. There is in-depth examinations of the issues that are on COLAGE’s minds from the unique perspective of people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents. In recent issues, we’ve tackled race, religion, family break-ups, and schools.

Whether you’re a kid, a youth, an adult, a parent, or an interested ally, *Just For Us* regularly brings views and perspectives about growing up in LGBT families that challenge, inspire, and connect. The words and ideas cannot be found anywhere else in the world. There is no other publication that brings these voices and resources together in one place.

We know that not just COLAGEers read *Just For Us*, many parents and allies rely on *Just For Us* (JFU) for the window it provides into the experiences of people with LGBT parents and families. JFU helps all of us as we strive to build community and break isolation regarding our families.

We are proud of this publication, and proud that COLAGE is able to provide such a unique and valuable forum to more than 2,000 households and organizations across the United States and around the world.

During our recent information gathering from COLAGE constituents as part of the COLAGE Strategic Plan, COLAGE heard loud and clear from you that JFU is a valuable resource upon which your whole family relies. You see it as an cornerstone of COLAGE’s services and if anything, you want more, not less of it. We would like to be able to do just that. To do so, we need your help.

This publication is the product of countless hours of hard work by the COLAGE staff, volunteers, writers, artists, designers, and printer. COLAGE Rosanne Johnson, our volunteer editor for nearly two years, spends many late nights writing, editing and proofing. Final word responsible for the increased breadth and depth of content that we’ve come to expect in the last years from *Just For Us*. But even with hundreds of hours donated by talented volunteers like Rosanne, *Just For Us* costs nearly $15,000 to produce and mail annually.

In order to produce JFU, COLAGE depends on the contributions of you, our members and friends. However, most people receiving JFU today have not contributed to COLAGE in over a year -- some for many years or not at all. Soon, COLAGE will no longer be able to afford to send JFU to non-contributors, except in cases of financial hardship.

COLAGE is pleased to announce that we have received a generous $10,000 challenge grant from the Gill Foundation. *This means that any gift you give now will be doubled dollar for dollar. That’s right, your contribution of $50 automatically doubles and becomes a gift of $100! This is the perfect time for you to support COLAGE, ensure that you continue to receive JFU, and make your donation go twice as far to make the continued productions of JFU and other COLAGE programs possible.

*This challenge grant applies to new gifts (anyone that hasn’t given in the last 12 months). For donors that have given in the last 12 months, any increase in your previous donation will be matched. For example, if you gave $50 in September, and send a gift of $75 today, the Gill Foundation will send COLAGE $25. Thank you for your donation to $100!*
Thank you for your support. Your generosity makes our critical work possible.

Your gift will directly benefit our work to make the world more supportive, safe, and celebratory for our families.

About the Author:

I am not afraid to share that my mother is a fabulous lesbian. She is out of the closet and I am right beside her.

Tina Fakheri-Dean, "Out of the Closet," Just For Us, Fall 2001

Thank you for your support now and throughout the years. Together we are succeeding in our mission to develop, engage, and organize COLAGE members and our families to make a better world for us and the generations growing up after us.

Yours in gratitude and with great respect,

Felicia Park-Rogers
Executive Director

P.S. COLAGE has a strong policy of making our resources available to everyone regardless of ability to pay. If it is impossible for you to make a contribution at this point in time, just make a note on the envelope, send it back to us, and you will continue to receive Just For Us.

P.P.S. Consider a monthly pledge of $10, $15, or $20 using your credit card or debit card. The Gill Foundation will match your entire pledge dollar for dollar, and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that for a few cents a day you are contributing to the only non-profit organization in the world that is run by and for people with LGBT parents and families.

* COLAGE values your privacy. The information requested in the donation envelope is merely to help us serve you better. We do not trade, sell, or share our database or mailing list information. Your information is safe with us.
THE BEGINNING

by Denise Connell

In the spring of 1996, I, a 26-year-old, bisexual woman, daughter of a gay father, moved to San Francisco. After 3 years in Boston, committed to the service of furthering the voice of children with gay parents, I accepted the position of associate director of COLAGE. Deep in my soul there was a rumbling, an apprehension. I was not willing to face the fact that I was not wholeheartedly committed to the move I was making. Within 4 months, I resigned from the position.

At that point in my life, I was completely lost with no rock to hold onto for strength. Far from family and friends, struggling to stay afloat financially and spiritually, I heard a voice one night as I walked to my apartment. I heard a woman singing praises to God with a voice that echoed to me at that moment, the most beautiful voice on the earth. I stepped into the entry way of the church to listen to her sing. The ushers tried to get me to enter the sanctuary, but I only wanted to hear her sing and then I was leaving. I would never sit in the same worship service with what I perceived to be "Conservative" Christians.

I knew little about Christianity. My family had attended the Episcopal Church regularly until my parents had divorced when I was nine. In Sunday school, we had learned about Moses. In a prayer, we said we believed Jesus Christ was the only Son of God. In a college mythology class, I had read the first 4 chapters of Genesis. However, my brief encounters with those who identified themselves as Christian had formed a strong hatred of Christians within me. These were the people who protested during Gay Pride Parade, yelling at my family and I. I was going to burn hell. They were the teens that harassed and beat several teens in one Boston High School, because they had tried to start a Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual group. They were small minded, bigoted and responsible for so much pain in my family and friends' lives. Neither my experiences nor my limited knowledge prepared me for what God was about to do in my life.

The singing stopped and I continued standing as the minister came up to the front. I remember the teaching was on faith - something I was in desperate need of at that moment. Jesus was sent to the earth "to redeem them that were under the law," and His blood was shed for the remission of sin. One had to believe in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. That's where faiths comes in. The faith to let go of what is secure and easy and reach for something better despite the appearance of danger. I did not embrace Christianity after that message, but my interest was piqued. Nothing I had heard resonated with the state teachings I remembered from Sunday school. What he had said made sense. I began to attend services on a regular basis.

It took 6 months of attending services, studying the Bible, beginning to pray, and watching my life continue to unravel before I confessed Jesus Christ as my savior, really believing in my heart that this was my only chance of salvation. I still would not sit in the sanctuary. Fellowship in a community of believers is a large piece of the Christian walk. I was encouraged to spend time with other Christian women. I still held within me a deep hatred of Christians, and one of my biggest fears was that I would become like them. I did not look like them, in my sleeveless tops and crew cut, I did not act like them, going to alternative films on Saturday nights and still dating a lot. I did not speak like them, as I questioned what I saw when doing and what they said they believed. And most days, I did not want to spend time with them. In honesty, I am certain that there were many days they did not want me around either. The few women I could connect with, I was attracted to in a physical way, which was not something most people wanted to acknowledge was a real issue in my life. I was in the process of having years of poor choices, habits and conditioning broken.

God was challenging me to look closely at what I thought love was and how I lived in it. I was grateful that God loved us so deeply that he sent His only Son to die for me. That was love. Love was not about sex or whom I was attracted to. Love was not about trying to change who I was to fit someone else's expectations. And love was definitely not about trying to get people to do what I wanted. I was barely tolerating my brothers and sisters in Christ, let alone truly loving them. My heart had been damaged over the years and I was and am still learning what love is and that it never fails.

Walking by faith in Christ Jesus produces change. Relationships with the people around me have had to change and evolve. One of those relationships is with my father. I lived with my father and his partner for 5 years through high school. We were always very close and he had a great impact on the woman I had become at 26. As I embraced Christianity, I could sense his apprehension. I told my dad about the conflicts I had with the people in the congregation I had joined. I talked with him about who Christ was, and about the readings I had studied. I shared my discovery that homosexuality was not compatible with walking after Christ. He challenged some of what I was learning. He voiced his concern that I would become one of those small-minded, bigoted people. He questioned why he would want to embrace a faith that thought he was an abomination before God.

My heart ached as I heard his pain and fear in that one statement. My father was walking on one path through life and for many years I had walked right behind him on that path. Now, I had chosen a different way with the free will God had given me. However, we are still father and daughter, and that bond is there until we die. "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none is without signification." I am to honor my mother and father whether I agree with how they have chosen to live or not. I love my father very much and I believe that we have a very honest relationship. I talked candidly to my dad about writing this article. His response was that he was glad this was my path and not his, but he would be thinking of me.

God has a plan and a purpose for each of us. I am grateful for what I have learned and continue to learn on the path God has laid out before me. This is simply one small piece and only the beginning of my life in Christ.

* Holy Bible, Bilingual Edition, King James Version; 1 Corinthians: 14:10

Denise Connell, 33, still lives in San Francisco. She has worked closely with Sword of Fire, Arrant of Light, Inc., a Bay-Area-based ministry, and is currently a member of Nuevo Pacto, a bi-Latin min-istry in South San Francisco, California. For further information about Sword of Fire, call (866) 265-9332. For further information about Nuevo Pacto, call (415) 585-9670.

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Mormon Church continued from page 1

(another Testament of Christ). The official position is that homosexuality is a sin and is morally wrong. However, the leaders of the church have pushed (within the last 2 years) towards a "Love thy neighbor" kind of thing. They say that while they strongly disagree with the practice of homosexuality, that they encourage their members to "love the sinner and not the sin." I have found that while growing up, I have always lived by the fact that I was born "sin". I was raised by "sinners" and (according to the church) I want to be with my family forever that they will have to repent while here on earth in order for all of us to be together after death. I have seen many of first hand experience that most people in the Mormon church are very closed-minded and extremely hateful toward gays. Even in a church setting there have been rude comments made and it just broke my heart every single time.

I am no longer a practicing Mormon, but my brother is and is currently serving a mission for the church in Brazil. I am tired of fighting with people and I don't think it is healthy for a person to put themselves in a situation where they are constantly feeling attacked and uncomfortable. I am sure that there are good Mormons who are tolerant and really do "love their neighbors", but I have become overwhelmed by the ones who don't.

I think that God and even Jesus, love all, no matter what and I believe that no matter what we do here on earth that we can be happy and live with our families forever. I am on my own spiritual path now and I find that I am much more peaceful about life when it is peaceful with me.

Sara is 20 years old and is from Houston, Texas. She lives in Utah where she attends college. She is currently pursuing a degree in Theatre and Music Performance. She likes to write, dance, and take lots of pictures and arrange scrapbooks.

A.J.'s Story continued from page 1

me cling to the everlasting arms (representative of the arms of Christ), even though I am not GLBT.

I have been very happy here, but the only downfall in small MCC churches is that there is not an overabundance of youth. At Maranatha for example, the most kids that were my age that were present every Sunday were three. So, a friend invited me to his church one Sunday at Second Baptist Church and I really enjoyed it. The only downfall was that they weren't as spiritually set as I was, and they believed that my parents' relationships was wrong. But I chose to chew the hay, and spit out the sticks, as we say down here in Texas. In doing so, I just seemed to ignore the problems and do my own thing. I have gotten extremely involved with the church and am not ready to leave. Yet within my soul, I feel this calling to venture back to my roots, as everyone does. So, in my absence from Maranatha, I still serve on Sundays there and worship there occasionally, but I do still attend Second Baptist regularly. Even though I am not at my old church, I still have huge ties there. Though I am torn at the moment, I have benefited from the spiritual aspects of both churches, although I went to one for only social growth, and to find teens that are like me.

I would say to all those COLAGEs out there who are struggling with their identity or that of their parents or any spiritual idea, to find a church or home base that is affirming to your specific aspects, and one that has the same type of mind as yourself. Because if you don't, then you will find yourself stuck like I presently am, and being in a rut in your spiritual life is very hard to undo.

A.J. Costa is a junior at Mayde Creek High School, in Houston, Texas. He is actively involved with his Theatre program, and is an officer of his Spanish Club.

Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence painted faces, performed a "cupcake walk", and used their very discreet paper fans to play kick the-helium balloons with the kids.
THE OLIVIA FILES
OLIVIA’S GUIDE TO CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATE

Have you ever wanted to say something, to voice your opinion, but didn't? Maybe you thought that you might lose a friend, or get picked on. But while it's not a good idea to say something that might hurt people, voicing your opinion is a good idea. You'd be surprised. Sometimes people just don't understand something, or are afraid of something. If you explain it to them, they may stop being scared or hateful. And you shouldn't stop at objecting to the school lunch. You can argue bigger things, too. Like gay rights, animal cruelty, you name it. Some schools even have Debate Clubs, specifically for the purpose of arguing.

Every argument is different. Sometimes my mom and I argue over stupid little things, sometimes over huge matters. There are as many ways of arguing as there are arguments. Here are some all-purpose debating tactics.

1. First off, before you go into a full-fledged fight, make sure whatever you're debating about makes sense. Learn how to tell the difference between a fight over chicken bones and a fight over gay rights. Keep that tactic in mind all through the argument. Don't start saying things you will regret (if you manage that, contact me and tell me how to do it, because I sure can't!). Getting carried away won't do any good. Staying cool, collected, and calm, on the other hand, will.

2. Second, borrow the Boy Scout motto, "Be Prepared". No need to adopt their policies, just that motto. If you don't know the facts on your side, then you have a very good chance of sounding like an absolute idiot. Don't worry if you do, at first. Even people in the Senate sound stupid sometimes. But people usually listen to hard down facts. I mean, who would you listen more to, the class dunce or the dictionary? It's also a good idea if you can prove your facts. Once you tell them a fact or two that you can confirm, the argument may be already won.

3. Remember that you don't HAVE to win. It's okay to agree to disagree. That doesn't mean you've given up on your cause. You've just given up on the argument.

Argumentatively,
Olivia Woods

COLAGE Olivia Woods, 11, lives in New Hampshire.

AJ TURPIN TALKS TO JUST FOR US

AJ Turpin, 25, lives and goes to college in San Francisco. He and his partner, Ian, will be getting married later this year; both AJ and Ian identify as transgender. A few years ago, AJ, who was brought up as a conservative Christian, became active in and converted to Reform Judaism. Just for us talked to AJ about this evening spirituality in light of being transgender and having a gay parent.

AJ: I grew up in Spokane Washington, where I was a typical masculine boy, I was very young age that it was not okay to be gay. In reference to men, because my dad is gay.

JFU: When did you find out that your dad was gay?

AJ: When I was 12.

JFU: And by 12 you had already picked up that message from your family?

AJ: Yeah. Well, I was raised in a right-wing, Christian family so not only did I get that message at home, but you get that message at church, too.

JFU: What churches were you were raised in?

AJ: There were many of them. When was very small, it was Pentecostal. And then, we changed churches and went to a Grace Brethren. And then the last two churches were both non-denominational churches, but very conservative. I would categorize the whole bunch of them as fundamentalist, as far as values go.

AJ: My mom always talked highly of my dad. I grew up thinking that it was basically my fault my dad wasn't in our lives, because she said that he left because he wasn't ready to be a father. So as a kid, I internalized that "well, if I hadn't been here, maybe he'd still be around", not knowing that he was gay. It didn't make sense to me at that age, so I started questioning my mom, and that's when she decided to tell me the truth, because I was asking.

JFU: Between 12 and 18, why didn't you see him?

AJ: Well, I hated him when I found out that he was gay. But I couldn't have told you why I was so angry with him. I think somewhere, deep inside of me, I questioned my own sexuality, and didn't want to have to deal with it. I could never have admitted it, being involved with the church, where they believe that if you are gay you are going to hell. And when I was involved in the church I believed that too.

JFU: Did you believe your father was going to hell?

AJ: Oh, yeah. As a kid, I thought it was my job to save him, somehow. Which is so sick and twisted, I know now.

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