

finally

free

Personal Stories: How Love and Self-Acceptance Saved Us from “Ex-Gay” Ministries



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION™

Dedication

Stuart Mathis

“Finally Free” is dedicated to Stuart Mathis, a gay Mormon from San Francisco who committed suicide because he was unable to change his sexual orientation. In his suicide note, he expressed his anguish over his church and society not accepting him for who he was.

Mathis wrote:

“The church has no idea that as I type this letter, there are surely boys and girls on their callused knees imploring God to free them from this pain. They hate themselves. They retire to bed with their fingers pointed to their heads in the form of a gun. I am now free. I am no longer in pain and I no longer hate myself. As it turns out, God never intended for me to be straight. Perhaps my death might be a catalyst for some good.”

While Mathis believes he is now “free,” we hope this publication will help others realize that there are alternative paths to freedom and acceptance.

The following essays are illustrations of how some people overcame their torment and went on to live healthy, productive lives as “out” gay men and lesbians. In dedicating “Finally Free” to Stuart Mathis, we hope to help him achieve his final wish of accomplishing “some good.”

finally

free

Personal Stories: How Love and Self-Acceptance Saved Us from “Ex-Gay” Ministries

Special Thanks

We acknowledge the Human Rights Campaign’s Communications Associate Director Wayne Besen for spearheading the research and writing. Thanks also to James Decker for graphic design and Janice Hughes for editorial coordination.

We also thank the following individuals who allowed us to use their personal stories: Jeffry Ford, Mark Pierpont, Tracey St. Pierre, Christopher C. Camp, David Fettke, Cheryl Johnson, Paul Williams, The Rev. Jerry Stephenson, Catherine Wulfensmith, Clint Trout, Karen B. Hindman, Scott Meléndez, Parker Allen Jr. and Brent Almond. Acknowledgment also goes to Jennie Smith, Andrew Huddleston and Noel Plemmons for their contributions.

Additional HRC Resources

For further information on ex-gay ministries, contact HRC to receive a copy of the 16-page publication “Mission Impossible: Why Reparative Therapy and Ex-Gay Ministries Fail.” Access this report via www.hrc.org/pubs/change.html or www.hrc.org/pubs/change.pdf.

For information on the relationship between organized religion and gay and lesbian Americans, contact HRC for a copy of the 35-page publication “Mixed Blessings: Organized Religion and Gay and Lesbian Americans” or visit www.hrc.org.

Dedication 2
Introduction 6
Jeffry Ford, St. Paul, Minn. 8
The Rev. Jerry Stephenson, Panama City, Fla.10
Catherine Wulfensmith, Monrovia, Calif.11
Christopher C. Camp, Baltimore, Md.12
David Fettke, Dallas, Texas14
Cheryl Johnson, Baltimore, Md.16
Mark Pierpont, Provincetown, Mass.17
Paul Williams, Phoenix, Ariz.18
Tracey St. Pierre, Washington, D.C.20
Brent Almond, Washington, D.C.22
Karen B. Hindman, Ruckersville, Va.24
Scott Meléndez, Washington, D.C.26
Parker Allen Jr., Little Rock, Ark.28
Clint Trout, Los Angeles, Calif.30
What the Experts Say33
Tell Your Story35
Resources37

When I was in middle school, there was a kid named David who wanted more than anything in the world to please his father and make the school's basketball team. The problem was, he was too short. When another summer passed and other students grew while he still hadn't, he became disconsolate. One day, a new physical education coach told him that he could grow taller if he would simply hang from a chin-up bar and stretch himself for an hour each afternoon. David religiously followed the coach's advice and could be seen after school suspended from a metal bar in the schoolyard.

After a month of dangling, David had convinced himself that he had grown. To the amusement of many students, he galloped around the school and boasted that he was now tall enough to make the basketball team.



Unfortunately, while the mind can play deceptive tricks, reality can be cruel and unforgiving. David, as short as ever, was humiliated at basketball tryouts and was cut on the first day by the very coach who told him to hang from the bar. Before he

sent David home, the coach told the devastated young man that he had failed to grow because he had not tried hard enough.

Much like this misguided coach, “reparative” therapists and the “ex-gay” ministries offer false “hope” and magic “cures” for desperate people, then turn around and cruelly blame these folks when their bizarre “treatments” fail.

The essays in “Finally Free: How Love & Self-Acceptance Saved Us from ‘Ex-Gay’ Ministries” are more than just stories about brave gay and lesbian Americans overcoming life's obstacles and challenges. These are stories that any person can relate to who has tried in vain to live up to the unrealistic expectations of peers or family members. Anyone who has chased affection by trying to be who or what he or she is not can understand why some people feel compelled to try changing their sexual orientation through the “ex-gay” ministries or “reparative” therapy. The fear of rejection and the desire to be loved and accepted is universal. Nearly all people want to make friends and family members proud — sometimes embracing desperate measures to do so.

“Finally Free” hopes to set the record straight on the astronomical, if not complete, failure rate of the “ex-gay”

ministries and “reparative therapy.” In their own words, ex-ex-gays vividly describe their harrowing experiences and reveal the painful, broken promises of these kinds of “change” groups.

All the following stories are true. They are about real people across America who gave up years of their lives and suffered through grave psychological trauma because they bought the lie that being gay made them defective and less than whole human beings. A common thread in each essay in “Finally Free” is how desperately these individuals tried to conform and reject their sexual orientation. Methods of change included all-night prayer sessions, exorcisms, fasting, lipstick application seminars for lesbians and endless, expensive sessions with so-called “reparative” therapists.

Somehow, in the midst of overwhelming personal turmoil and stifling social pressures, these courageous individuals learned how to love and accept themselves for who they are — not who the Christian Coalition's Pat Robertson and others told them they should be. More remarkable, by “coming out” they finally discovered the close, personal relationships with God that they had originally sought through the “ex-gay” ministries.

The journeys undertaken by these people are a testament to the strength and resilience of the human spirit. They offer hope to “ex-gays” still trapped in a lifestyle where they are demeaned and dehumanized because of who they are. The essays in “Finally Free” should be read by anyone who has questions about the efficacy of the “ex-gay” ministries and “reparative” therapy.

Unholy Alliance

These moving stories must also be told because the conservative right has recently embraced “ex-gay” ministries and “reparative” therapy as a tactic to undermine gay and lesbian equality. Their message: “Since gays and lesbians can change, there is no need for laws that protect them from discrimination.”

This unholy alliance between the conservative right and “ex-gay” groups is a fairly new phenomenon. For more than two decades, the “ex-gay” ministries acted in relative obscurity. Both gay activists and the religious right saw these ministries as ineffective and not worthy of attention. Similarly, “reparative therapy,” which seeks to change homosexuals into heterosexuals, was — and still is — rejected by nearly all respected, credible medical and mental health experts. For years, the vast majority of social conservatives were also skeptical, if not overtly hostile, to the dubious claims of “reparative” therapists and their reliance on secular methods to “cure” homosexuality.

All this changed in June 1998 when 18 far right organizations, including the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council, launched a major advertising blitz advocating “reparative therapy.” The \$500,000 “Truth in Love” campaign began with a full-page ad in *The New York Times*. The advertisement featured Anne Paulk, who was described as a “wife, mother and former lesbian,” under the headline “I’m Living Proof the Truth Will Set You Free.” Additional ads ran in six large newspapers: *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Times*.

One ad featured football star Reggie White who labeled gay people as sinners. In perhaps the most contro-

“The journeys undertaken by these people are a testament to the strength and resilience of the human spirit.”

versial ad, a 5-year-old boy is pictured blowing out candles under the headline, “From Innocence to AIDS, One Mother’s Plea to the Parents of Homosexuals.”

On Mother’s Day 1999, the Center for Reclaiming America for Christ took its “ex-gay” message to the air-

waves by launching a television ad campaign in Washington, D.C. The center vehemently denied it was running these ads in the nation’s capital to sway political leaders. Later, however, center spokesman Bob Carter told *The Washington Post* that the ads first ran in Washington because, “that’s where the policy-makers are.”

This initial ad blitz in the capital was followed by a television campaign in Orlando, Fla., during “Gay Day” at Disney World. Additionally, the Center for Reclaiming America for Christ rented an airplane to fly over the amusement park with a large banner that read, “Freedom From Homosexuality: Jesus Christ.”

But despite the expensive, high-profile ad campaigns, one thing has not changed: “Ex-gay” ministries and “reparative” therapy do not work. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association says, “the potential risks of ‘reparative therapy’ are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient.”

Other respected medical and mental health groups such as the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics echo the APA’s view. (For more information on “ex-gay” ministries and “reparative” ther-

apy, contact HRC to receive “Mission Impossible: Why Reparative Therapy and Ex-Gay Ministries Fail” or visit www.hrc.org.)

The positions taken by these esteemed organizations are bolstered by the fact that leading “reparative” therapists and “ex-gay” ministries have steadfastly refused to keep statistics or conduct studies on how many of their clients have “changed.” When Dr. Joseph Nicolosi — the nation’s leading “ex-gay” therapist and head of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuals — was asked by *Newsweek* why he has done no follow-up studies on his patients he replied, “I don’t have time.”

Straight from the Heart

The “ex-gay” ministries attract new recruits by claiming that there is a “cure” for people who are unhappy being gay. However, “Finally Free” makes it clear that the cure for unhappiness is not the “ex-gay” ministries — but coming out and living honestly and openly with dignity and self-respect. It is not gay men and lesbians who need to change — which is not possible — but negative attitudes and discrimination against gay people that need to be abolished.

“Finally Free” is intended for use as an educational tool, and to share the truth about the “ex-gay” ministries and “reparative” therapy that the political right does not want the public to hear. Unlike the political right who pay “ex-gays” as much as \$65,000 per year for their testimony, no one was paid for their story in “Finally Free.”

These essays are straight from the heart. The only reward for the writers is knowing that by coming forward they might help other people avoid following in their footsteps.

My name is Jeffry Ford. I am licensed psychologist and marriage and family therapist. I am a former Director of OutPost Inc., an agency with the stated purpose of healing homosexuals. I represented OutPost at the annual meeting of Exodus International. Exodus is a national umbrella organization for various agencies that attempt to cure homosexuals through numerous means ranging from deliverance of demons to various forms of “reparative” therapy.

I have been heavily involved in the so-called “ex-gay” movement. I have now come to realize that it is unlikely to be able to change one’s sexual orientation in a lasting way, and that the process of attempting to change one’s own or another’s sexual orientation is potentially very damaging.

For as long as I have conscious memory, I have known that my primary emotional, sexual and affectional preference has been for men. I was raised during a period in history when to be homosexual was considered deviant, sinful, unspeakable and offensive. I learned early in life that I should not expose that part of myself to anyone. The subject of homosexuality was shrouded with shame and disgust and I learned to hate and fear my own homosexuality. I learned to hide it, disguise it, ignore it and repress it.

I learned how to “act like” a heterosexual. It wasn’t all that hard. There were heterosexual role models all over the place. I learned how to talk about girls and to make fun of sissies. I learned how to date and have sex with women. (My technique involved closing my eyes and fantasizing about men.) I hated myself for what I was doing and desperately hoped that if I faked it long enough, it would someday come naturally. At age 17, I made a personal commitment to the Christian faith.

Evangelical Christianity taught me that homosexuals were condemned to hell. I continued my process of hiding and acting. I tried with all my heart not to be gay. I prayed and repented and begged God to change me. I got married at the age of 20 to try to be “normal,” with great hopes of becoming straight. I withheld the truth about my sexual orientation from my wife for the first year and a half of our marriage.

I gave up a good-paying job, and my wife and I moved to Minnesota where I began seeing a psychologist who believed by using electric shock he could cure me of my homosexuality. I decided to tell my wife about it since it was for both of us. I went through 40 or more sessions twice a week during which the psychologist strapped electrodes to my arms and hooked me up to a “penile plythysmograph” (an instrument that, when attached to the penis, can measure blood engorgement).

I can still remember the horror I felt every time I sat in the chair. I can still feel the shame and embarrassment of having wires hooked to my arm and penis while looking at pictures of naked men. Intermittently, the psychologist would give me an electric shock that would involuntarily catapult my arm several inches into the air. When leaving his office, I always felt embarrassed and tried to hide the two red burn marks the electrodes left on my arm.

My wife and I both hoped and prayed for my “healing.” After the completion of the sessions, I found myself several hundred dollars poorer and still gay.

‘Fallen Into Sin’

I began attending a ministry to homosexual men called OutPost. It was a group of a dozen or so “ex-gay” men who came together for fellowship, teaching and mutual support. I was somewhat confused because many in the group still looked, acted and behaved like the stereotypical gay male, but they called themselves “ex-gay.” On a weekly basis, various members of the group would report they had “fallen into sin.” We would listen to all the gory details and then pray with them for forgiveness.

Only months after I began attending OutPost meetings, I was asked to come on as full-time staff. I quit my job and became director of men’s counseling. I was soon giving my testimony of healing and change. I was counseling men and women who wanted to change their sexual orientation.

The attention and power I felt as a counselor and director did a lot to keep my focus off of my



own sexuality. I learned how to deny I was having homosexual attractions. I rationalized them as being temptations and told myself, “everyone is tempted by something.”

I learned how to use language to my own advantage and to speak about the “process of change.” When I went to churches and college classrooms, I told the story of my life, my conversion and my subsequent healing from homosexuality. “Surely, God knows my heart and how badly I want to be healed,” I would rationalize. “It can’t hurt to shade the truth just a little, can it?”

My wife and I became heavily involved in OutPost. When the founder of the agency left, I became director and my wife left her job to join me as the assistant director. During this time we adopted two children. My techniques for denying my homosexuality and for performing heterosexually began to fail. My wife and I began to have serious talks about what we were seeing — both in our marriage and around us in the “ex-gay” ministries.

Since we were directors of one of the country’s oldest and most respected “ex-gay” ministries, we were privy to inside information about leaders and ministries across the country and internationally.

“The psychologist would give me an electric shock that would involuntarily catapult my arm several inches into the air.”

We watched as various ministries folded due to the leader’s sexual indiscretion. Silently, members of the board of Exodus International, the national umbrella organization, would be dismissed in shame. (A founder of Exodus eventually left and subsequently embraced his own homosexuality.) Within Exodus, more emphasis was placed on obedience and celibacy. Heterosexuals were directing more and more “change” ministries.

For years, I had avoided any kind of intimacy with men, especially “ex-gay” men, because I feared my own capacity to withstand temptation. I met and fell in love with a member of the local group, Homosexuals Anonymous. We strove for years to keep our friendship “pure” and to avoid acting on impulses that seemed to come so naturally. My wife was aware of my friendship with this man, as well as our struggle to keep the relationship non-erotic. At the time, I believed this relationship was OK. I felt it was supported by a theory backed by British theologian and self-proclaimed “ex-gay” scholar Elizabeth Moberly. One major part of Moberly’s theory involves the development of deeply loving and committed non-erotic same-sex friendships. Moberly’s theory encouraged taking the risk, even if the relationship became sexualized.

But the internal dissonance was becoming too great for my wife and me. We began to allow ourselves to question what was happening. I struggled hard to find honesty and truth but was terrified by what I saw. I was being confronted squarely with my own deceptiveness, dishonesty and lack of personal integrity. Although my wife was aware of the sexual aspect of this relationship, I was not being honest with others around us.

In my attempt to find a healing, I found instead a method of self-denial and self-alienation. I never intended to harm anyone but in reality I hurt many people. I encouraged others to engage in the same kind of self-denial game that I was playing. I encouraged people to move out of loving relationships and made promises of hope and healing.

With the help of two very good therapists, my wife and I were able to do a great deal of psychological and spiritual work. We came to realize that we wanted to find and face the pain and truth. We opened ourselves up before one another and God and we accepted the painful reality that our marriage would have to end. It was not the end of our friendship, however.

We now live four blocks apart, we share our parenting responsibilities equally, and we continue to love and respect one another. We have both come to accept and celebrate our unique identities. My partner and I moved in together and have covenanted ourselves to one another. I am now and have always been gay. My children love and accept my partner as a father figure, as he has had a significant role in my life and in their lives since they were infants. No longer do I hang my head in shame and hide from the “love that dare not speak its name.”

Finally, in the five-plus years that I was directly involved with this “change” movement, I do not believe that I saw one genuine change or shift in sexual orientation.

At a very early age, I knew there was something different about me. It would be many years later that I would know and accept the fact I was a gay man. It took 15 years as a Baptist minister, Bible teacher and seminary professor for me to face reality about my sexual orientation. During my two years in the “ex-gay” movement, I not only sought counseling but was also engaged to a woman. I sought personal healing from a well-known television evangelist to cure my homosexuality.

“I contemplated taking my own life.”

All of my ups and downs seemed too much to take. I contemplated taking my own life.

After leaving the “ex-gay” movement, being forced out of a Bible college as a professor for being part of an “ex-gay” group, and being condemned to hell by the fundamentalist establishment, I decided to face reality head-on. It was the pain and suffering that caused me to search for truth both spiritually and psychologically. It was only through proper counseling and spiritual renewal that I regained hope, happiness, and love for myself. I feel whole now, living exactly as the person that God made me.

In the last 10 years, I have been able to tell the truth about my being a Christian who happens to be gay. This alone has allowed me to counsel many “ex-gays” who have found the freedom to be Christian and gay. Today, I am a part of the Alliance of Christian Churches, which gives hope to Christians who support gays or are gay themselves. I am proud to serve as president of Grace Institute, a Bible college and seminary granting degrees to gay ministers.

I have learned so much on my road to recovery as a gay man — despite the abuse by the “ex-gay” ministries and the Southern Baptist Church. I believe my salvation has nothing to do with a person being gay, straight, black, white, male or female. It is based upon my faith in Jesus Christ.

After all has been said and done, I am living proof that homosexuals cannot be changed or cured. We as gays have only begun to fight the battle of bigotry, hatred and lies coming out of the “ex-gay” ministries. Some day I hope we can say Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous words: “Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we are free at last.”



I entered the “ex-gay” ministry, Love in Action, in the fall of 1986 and for the first time in my life, I felt like I finally belonged. Labeling myself “ex-gay” finally gave me an identity I felt comfortable with. It was probably the “gay” part I identified with. Putting it under the context of “ex-gay” allowed me to relax.

I grew up in a fundamentalist family. My father was a pastor in a small Protestant denomination until he took a position as a national leader in the group. All my life I was told what was right and wrong — with the church and the Bible as the basis. And so, the only way I could reconcile what I was beginning to understand as my sexual orientation with what I had always believed about God and the Bible was to declare myself “ex-gay.” Everyone in my group, including myself, was proclaimed “ex-gay” as soon as we entered the program.



Catherine Wulfensmith (right) and family.

I had great hopes for change. After all, Frank Worthen — the leader of my “ex-gay” ministry and a founder of Exodus International — had lived a homosexual “lifestyle” for many years and had changed. And there were many books for us to read about how to change our thinking and keep it godly. Psychological books explained that our homosexuality was caused by failing to bond with our same-sex parents. The solution, these books said, was to connect with a same-sex therapist who would serve as a surrogate for our absent parents and fulfill the needs that were never met. Under the Love in Action program, the purported same-sex bonding needs were supposed to be fulfilled by our group leaders. All I knew was that I was determined to try my hardest to become “ex-gay.”

My first wake-up call to the problems of this particular ministry occurred on Thanksgiving Day in our live-in quarters for women. We had to get permission to watch television so that the leaders could monitor what we were watching. Several of us received approval to watch the annual Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade. After the parade, however, we continued watching the football game that came on. One of the leaders thundered into the room and immediately started screaming at us, since we had not received permission to watch foot-

ball. Stunned, we sat there and watched her cut the cable to the TV with a butcher knife.

I should have known at that point that something was unbalanced, but I believed that I didn’t have any alternatives. I became depressed because my orientation wasn’t changing. Interestingly, at this point, the leaders decided that I needed therapy. I was given the ultimatum to either enter therapy with a Christian therapist or be expelled. I entered therapy, which saved my life.

I never broke a single rule they laid out for me, and yet, when I got so depressed that I was suicidal, they kicked me out. And so in my most vulnerable state, I became homeless.

My therapist helped me see how cult-like this “ex-gay” ministry was. The rules were set up to control our thinking and behavior. The whole premise was to use “group-think” to put pressure on us to change our ways. I lived in the Love in Action house for one year, and during that year I saw many participants “fall,” as they say. Over and over, there would be public confessions of sex with the same gender.

In my opinion, having served extensive time in an “ex-gay” program, the most change in orientation that can occur has to do only with behavior and not feelings. Even those who had claimed change in orientation for years would admit privately that same-sex attractions would still bother them and tempt them.

Today, I am happily married to another woman. Together, we have adopted two children. I am glad to be a lesbian and wouldn’t change my orientation for the world. I have found peace in accepting myself for who I am.

“When I got so depressed that I was suicidal, they kicked me out. And so in my most vulnerable state, I became homeless.”

I was raised in a loving, conservative family in Southern California. I was close to my father and mother but as far back as I can remember, I always felt “different” from the rest of my family. When I was in kindergarten, I had a crush on David, the boy in first grade who lived across the street from me.

In the third grade, I stumbled across the word “homosexual” in the dictionary and knew immediately that it applied to me. I also knew that I would have to do everything that I could to conceal that fact from my family and friends, that I would never be accepted if they knew who I really was. Seeking to immerse myself in “masculine” activities to avoid detection, I was active in football, soccer, track and the swim team. And I always had a steady girlfriend.

In junior high school, I felt increasingly different from my peers. I felt that if I had enough sexual experiences with girls, I would not be homosexual anymore — but nothing changed. I didn’t dare confide in anyone, lest they humiliate me by revealing my dark secret to the world. I felt hopeless, and soon became suicidal. It was at that point that I became involved with a Campus Life group sponsored by Youth for Christ, and at the age of 16, I entered my new life as a “born-again Christian.” I hoped that also meant I could become “normal” like everyone else.

I quickly rose through the ranks and became a student leader in our high school Christian Student Union. I went through leadership training with Campus Crusade for Christ and I began spending time with my local pastor, who taught me how to pray, share my faith and study the Bible.

In my freshman year of college, when everything seemed to be turning out well for me, something happened that shook me to the core. I fell in love with my best friend and ended up making love to him. Feeling unclean, I felt that my world had fallen apart. I felt I had let God, my family and my friends down. Desperately seeking help, I turned to my college pastor for guidance. After going through many hours of intensive counseling, prayer and study with my pastor and therapist, they referred me to a support group for “ex-gays” that met at our church.

The group leaders had been trained by a group called Exodus International.

The group would meet for Bible study, prayer and fellowship. If any of us felt “tempted,” we were to call on someone else in the group for strength and support. Soon, it became apparent to me that most of the men in the group still seemed to be homosexuals. The hint of homosexuality was still present — in the clasp of a handshake, the closeness of an embrace, or a lingering gaze.

‘If I Was Devout Enough..’

The group’s definition of a homosexual as “someone who practices homosexual behavior” was too shallow for me. As I understood the biblical saying, “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks,” even though I was not having homosexual sex, I was still a homosexual. My thoughts and feelings had not substantially changed, though I did try to deny them. I knew that the only way I could change was to immerse myself in memorizing the Bible. I felt that if I was devout enough, somehow I could be changed from the inside out.

Throughout my college years, I was active as a student leader in the Baptist Student Union and numerous other organizations: I was trained by the Navigators and helped to start the local chapter of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. I led Bible study groups for fellow students twice a week. I conducted college workshops for L’Abri Christian Fellowship. My college co-pastor and I assisted in research for the Family Discipleship series in Focus on the Family, led by Dr. James Dobson. I followed a rigorous daily Bible memorization, study and meditation regimen. In 1979, I entered Dallas Theological Seminary as a world missions major.

I was elected twice to be class representative to the Student Missions Fellowship, and organized groups of “prayer cells” for seminarians on the mission field. I had a steady girlfriend and we were discussing the possibility of marriage.



It was while I served on a new church extension team overseas that I had a profound realization: through seven years of countless hours of Bible study, intense counseling sessions, prayer vigils, agonizing and soul-searching, I was still a homosexual. My thoughts, desires and drives had not changed. More than that, I realized that as far back as I could remember, I had always felt the way I did. At no time did I ever choose to be a homosexual — no more than someone chooses to be heterosexual. I just was. My experiences were in direct contrast to what I was taught in church and seminary.

I came to view my homosexuality as something I was born with — a moral neutral, like my hair or eye color, or my ethnicity. It was what I did with my life that made it good or bad, not who I was.

“Soon it became apparent that most of the men in the group still seemed to be homosexuals.”

Where are my friends and companions from Exodus International and other “ex-gay” groups now?

Many were so unhappy about not being able to change their orientation that they committed suicide. Some lived double lives; they lived one life publicly as heterosexuals, with wives and children, active in church, seminary or Bible college; they maintained a second, secret life as closeted homosexuals.

Where am I now? I am happier with my life now more than ever, knowing that I don't have to hide any more. I have rediscovered my faith — deeper and more intense than before. And, knowing that I am called into the ministry, I intend to complete my seminary training in the near future.

What do I hope and pray for? I pray for the day when gay, lesbian and bisexual teens will no longer feel estranged and isolated for being different. I pray that they will not feel compelled to engage in self-destructive behavior, including drug abuse, unsafe sex and suicide. And I pray that they gain strong self-confidence and self-esteem — so that they can grow up to become happy, healthy, well-adjusted, responsible people.

I first acknowledged to myself that I was gay when I was 14 years old. It was the loneliest and most terrifying feeling I had ever experienced in my young life. I was raised in a home where sex was never discussed. Therefore, it was natural for me to keep to myself what I believed at the time to be a horrible secret.

I tried to ignore the issue by burying myself in schoolwork and church activities with the hope that God would see how sincerely I wanted to change. Of course, keeping such a deep, dark secret was doing emotional damage without me realizing it. It is hard to make friends or let people get close when you are trying to keep secrets from them.

I continued to bury myself in school and church well into college, but the extreme loneliness and isolation was taking its toll on me. When I was in graduate school, something snapped inside me and I went into a deep depression. I wanted to die, but I was afraid that I would go to hell for my “sin.” I mustered up the courage to go to a minister at a conservative church I had just started attending, and told him my secret. He was very respectful and said that he was proud of my courage and strength for telling him I was gay. He referred me to a psychologist, which began my downward spiral into the world of reparative therapy and “ex-gay” ministries.

This psychologist told me that he didn’t think I was gay, but simply homophobic. A glimmer of hope started to bloom inside me that perhaps I wasn’t gay after all. But I didn’t understand the psychologist’s theory that I was homophobic. It didn’t make sense, but I continued seeing him for therapy. At different times he said it would be a shame if I were to pursue a “homosexual lifestyle.” He blamed my sexual feelings on my parents, who he said were abusive — although I never thought they were.

Finally, he referred me to an “ex-gay” group in Dallas. The group leader was very kind and I immediately found a kinship with the other group members. For the first time in my life I felt like I belonged, that I fit in. It was also the first time in my life that I felt free to talk about my homosexuality. There were no promises of a cure, and all of the leaders were very clear that all of us would probably struggle with homosexual feelings for the rest of our lives. The focus was on developing a right relationship with God, with the hope that the homosexual feelings would diminish over time. And we would be able to enter into heterosexual relationships.

The experience was a mishmash of group therapy, pop psychology and Bible study. Through this group, I stopped going to my psychologist, and started seeing a “reparative” therapist recommended by the “ex-gay” ministry. I went to “ex-gay” meetings and therapy once a week. At the time, I didn’t realize the subtle and not so subtle messages that were permeating my life. If God loved me, why wouldn’t He change me? Why wasn’t God answering my prayers? My conclusion was that God hated me. I couldn’t blame Him because I hated myself too.

Encouraged to Play ‘Masculine’ Sports

My reparative therapist reinforced this self-hatred. He said that because of my “depravity” that I had somehow chosen to be attracted to men before age five. This baffled me, because I don’t remember ever having made a choice to be attracted to men. Sometimes he would yell at me saying that I was a “deceiver,” and that I was “manipulative.” This treatment resonated inside me because of my own self-hatred. I thought that I deserved to be treated this way because I was so evil.

I didn’t know any other way to live, so of course I chose to continue down the “ex-gay” path. I began attending meetings with another “ex-gay” group. The treatment program was loosely based on antiquated psychological theories and on Christian teaching. We had a treatment manual full of various masculinity/femininity exercises, writing assignments and aversion therapy suggestions (ammonia inhalers). When we were “tempted”, we were encouraged to break open an ammonia inhaler and take a sniff. We were encouraged to play “masculine” sports. The treatment-



manual itself was over 200 pages long. The group met once a week and was similar in format to group therapy. People would discuss their “temptations” or how they had “fallen off the hetero-wagon” during the week.

Toward the end of my involvement with this “ex-gay” group, I had started drinking heavily and was living a double life. It seemed the longer I was involved with “ex-gay” ministries, the more self-destructive my behavior became. I went to the meetings, but my heart was no longer in it.

During this time, a friend from my church suggested that I go to an exorcist. In a desperate last-ditch effort to change, I decided to go. I had several sessions with him that cost me hundreds of dollars. It was not cheap to rid myself of the “demon of homosexuality.” He supposedly cast the gay demon out, as well as the “demon of alcohol,” and sundry other demons. But the familiar temptations and homosexual desires returned quickly after the exorcisms. My drinking increased dramatically.

At this point in my life, I lost all hope and fell into a deep state of despair. On several occasions, I gathered numerous pills together into a glass and would hold the glass in one hand while drinking alcohol with the other. I was trying to work up the nerve to take the pills, but I was terrified to commit suicide because I thought I would go to hell for being homosexual. I was too terrified to live and too terrified to die. Ironically, my “ex-gay” group leader helped me get to a hospital emergency room in May 1996.

That was the moment that my life truly started to change. I was admitted to a treatment center for my alcoholism and depression and I never returned to the “ex-gay” ministries, churches, or reparative therapists that had been my way of life for almost ten years. Lying in the hospital, I realized that the path I had chosen was literally killing me and I didn’t think that God wanted me to die. I started trying to accept myself the way I was. Fortunately, my parents and brother have been

“I now believe that self-acceptance and love is the only path that God honors.”

extremely supportive in my recovery and I have several friends who never gave up on me, even in my darkest hour.

It has been a difficult road the last three years in recovery. I continue to struggle with depression and low self-esteem, but I slowly see progress. I have not had a drink of alcohol in almost three years, and I have new friends who love and care for me just the way I am. I know that I will probably have many scars from my involvement with “ex-gay” ministries and reparative therapists, but I now have hope that I can repair and rebuild my life.

In retrospect, I can see the extreme damage inflicted on me by people who thought they were actually helping me. It is amazing the evil that people will unleash on others in the name of God. In my almost 10 years of involvement in these ministries, I never noticed even the slightest change in my homosexual desires.

Unfortunately, these ministries prey on lonely, hurting, isolated people and slowly dismantle their self-esteem, hope and faith in God. I have not known anyone from either “ex-gay” group that I participated in that changed their sexual orientation. Many people changed their behavior for a time, but almost all of them have reached the path of accepting their homosexuality.

I now believe that self-acceptance and love is the only path that God honors. God did not change me because I wasn’t supposed to change. I would have been a much happier person had I learned this lesson at an earlier age. My hope is that anyone currently involved in “ex-gay” ministries — or considering them — re-examines their motives for doing so. God has bigger and better plans for your life than the “ex-gay” ministries ever dreamed of.

I write as a survivor of “ex-gay” ministry. I first learned of the “ex-gay” ministries from a minister who told me I could be healed of my homosexuality. As a young, vulnerable woman eager for social acceptance and the support of the church, I became involved with Regeneration, a Baltimore-based group affiliated with Exodus

“Throughout this time, my thoughts, my feelings and relationships never changed.”

International. I participated in group meetings based on a 12 step model. Within a year, I became part of the ministry’s leadership team, ran group meetings, addressed groups about the “ex-gay” experience, and provided “ex-gay” counseling to others seeking “healing” and “freedom.” Throughout this time, my thoughts, feelings and relationships never changed.

To further promote my “healing,” I needed to deny my sexual orientation, become more feminine and terminate relationships with gay men and lesbians. Although I did not realize it at the time, this was very damaging to me.

When I finally left Regeneration, I continued to wrestle with the painful feelings of self-doubt, self-condemnation and shame brought on by participation in this group. As I began to deal with my own internalized homophobia, I fully rejected the notion of “ex-gay.”

What followed was the beginning of a long, hard struggle with spirituality and genuine self-acceptance. I began to wrestle with what it means to be a lesbian. I wondered if my sexual orientation and the church were compatible. Reality quickly raised its head and within a couple of weeks, members of the church I attended began to harass me. Phone calls at work, unending questions and Bible beating became a regular part of my life. Finally, the leader of Regeneration requested that if my partner and I would not change our ways, we needed to leave the church we were attending. We did.

Throughout this time, I searched for support. But my support system failed. The perception by my friends and fellow churchgoers of my “sinful” life divided us. And so, I was forced to make a choice between my sexual orientation and their allegiance. In a matter of eight months, my church and friends disappeared into the shadows of self-righteousness.

As a result of the emotional brutality I experienced, I began to question both God and the church. I wasn’t sure I wanted to be involved in an institution that promotes such hatred, fear, sexism and homophobia. I now have a spirituality that allows me to understand better God’s transcendence of the church and the failings of a human institution.

Because of the pain and anger I feel when I even enter a church, I no longer participate in institutionalized religion. My journey continues.



I was both a victim and a victimizer in “conversion therapy.” After a brief time of being “out of the closet” in my late teens, I repented and immersed myself completely in fundamentalist Christianity in order to find relief from my terrible sense of shame and guilt.

Eventually, I attended seminary and missionary training school and became an international evangelist, preaching to thousands. I initiated evangelistic campaigns to reach gay people with the message that coming to Jesus could heal them. I organized teams that went into gay bars and distributed a tract I had written entitled, “How I ‘Came Out.’” At the time, I failed to acknowledge that the title of the tract itself was deceptive — that it was really about my own desire to somehow stay in touch with gay people, albeit by trying to convert them.

I was 100 percent successful in changing my behavior, and even my thoughts, though it was very difficult. After years of intense struggle, prayer and frequent fasting, I considered myself freed from an evil temptation.

Eventually, I married a woman. Since I enjoyed sex with my wife, and my desires for men were completely under control, I convinced myself that my healing was complete. I also became more aggressive in my passion to convince others to come to Jesus and be healed.

But was this healing or was it intense and dangerous denial and self-hatred? Although I had control of my actions and my thoughts, I continued to have unsolicited desires, feelings and responses. I was romantically and sexually attracted to men. It was much more than a sexual desire. In fact, at that time in my life, sexual thoughts about a man were so shameful and terrifying they had no place in my life whatsoever. Still, I had a powerfully innate desire for an intimate connection with another man. Those feelings would leave me lost in a cloud of shame, and I would secretly plead with God to heal me. The shame would lead to extended periods of fasting (sometimes two weeks with nothing but water).

In addition, the internal conflict began to take its toll on my physical and mental health. On more than one occasion, my trembling body would be instantly drenched in sweat as I struggled with panic, fear and rage. I slowly began to realize that I was not “healed” as I had thought and so boldly proclaimed.

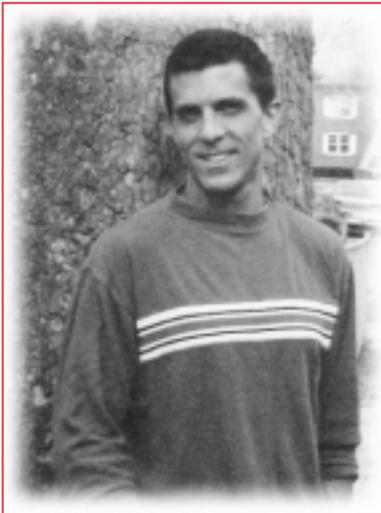
Late one night, when the frustration was overwhelming, I found my way to honesty. “God, I want a man!” I dared say, with tears coursing down my face. It was, perhaps, the most candid moment I had ever known with God and with myself. No apology. Just honesty. Desperate, raw, unpretentious communication with my creator.

“I never had real peace until I embraced myself just as I am.”

I was utterly confounded. At that moment, I felt the presence of pure love and acceptance like I had never known in all of my years as a preacher. I remember arguing with God and myself, absolutely amazed that my acknowledgement of my homosexuality did not result in shame, but an overall sense of love.

Yes, God led me out of the closet. That was eight years ago. I no longer have the violent panic attacks. I finally did find healing and freedom. I have peace with God and with myself.

It took years of painful struggle, but I have learned: You may be able to change your behavior. You might even be able to valiantly gain control over your thoughts. But you can never change who you really are. Why would you want to? You are beautiful the way God made you. You aren't a mistake. You aren't evil. I no longer think God wants to change something so beautiful. I never had real peace until I embraced myself just as I am.



In 1994, I walked away from the Jehovah's Witness organization. Many people wonder why a gay man would join such a strict religion.

In high school, a friend and Jehovah's Witness saw that I was ripe for conversion. Quite sincerely, she preached the all-too-simple answers that seemed to resolve every question about life, death and — well, everything! More poignantly, I secretly harbored the hope that my homosexuality, which I had yet to fully acknowledge to myself, would be eradicated by associating with what the Witnesses termed “the truth.”

Like most Bible-based religions, the Jehovah's Witnesses abhorred homosexuality, so I had real incentive both to try to change, and to keep quiet about my conflicting feelings. I would come to realize that homosexuality was such a taboo amongst the Witnesses that I would never find myself in a position to enlist the help of the elders (or congregational male leaders). I can safely surmise the elders would not have known what to do anyway.

Witness magazines speak of homosexuality in trite psychoanalytical terms: an absent father and a domineering mother yield a homosexual boy. The magazines reminded — especially fathers — to make sure that young Witness boys had plenty of fatherly male association so that they would not later, according to the model, seek out homosexual relationships.

Of course, I smelled a rat. I was well-read enough to know that such theories were naive and not supported by scientific research. They left huge gaps in explaining the evolutionary process of how a boy goes from wanting Daddy to play ball with him to sexually preferring males. Even those who attempted to explain this, ultimately, only offered more theory and assertions like, “We're not sure how it happens, but we know it just does.”

Moreover, because the Witness organization was largely gender-segregated — with the exception of courting — I was thoroughly saturated with male companionship. Indeed, much of that male companionship was very close, non-sexual friendship, supposedly the recipe used by many “ex-gay” groups as the medicine to cure my supposed psychological need for males. Nothing changed. In fact, within some of these friendships, there was a blossoming of love and accompanying natural sexual feelings.

On rare occasions, and in response to some of the media-hype about a “gay gene” the Witness magazines would tentatively admit the remote possibility that homosexuality was inborn — only because all mankind was born in sin, and would inherit sinful tendencies like homosexuality. Indeed, inheritance — even of sin — as the reasoning went, was genetic. But the Watchtower Society counseled such Witnesses “struggling” against this possibly genetic sinful tendency, not to use the genetic quotient as an excuse. Instead, we were to fight our genes and not give in.

“At the sight of an attractive man, my flimsy mental house of cards would topple.”

Furthermore, the Witness publications would carry life stories of “cured” homosexuals who, by virtue of some kind of nebulous power I had yet to experience, had now found women appealing, married and fathered children. A more careful reading of these life stories often revealed a very brief revelation that the Witness still struggled with his homosexual feelings, but was ever appreciative of God's help in smothering them.

Confused by the Witness rhetoric and having no one to turn to within the organization, I leapt into cognitive and behavioral psychology, as well as psychoanalytical theory. I aggressively underwent a campaign of self-therapy. Of course, what this really translated into was years of self-loathing, self-flagellation and obsessive thought control that was ultimately futile.

Finally, I found that my self-esteem was never lower than when I was in this deep state of denial. I tried to use my mind like a vise grip to clamp down on homosexual feelings. But at the sight of an attractive man, my flimsy mental house of cards would topple down. The reflexive rush of emotional and sexual feelings would overwhelm my wall of denial.



After seven years, I finally left the Witnesses organization. The real healing began. Indeed, the self-acceptance of being gay is what healed any childhood wounds, not its attempted eradication. Contrary to what the “ex-gay” ministries say about gays being maladjusted, I never have felt so well-adjusted since I have come out of a stifling, oppressive environment toward gay people.

I am here to say that “ex-gay” ministries are snake oil and the salespeople are the pseudo-scientists of religious-political organizations. Do the testimonies of so-called “ex-gays” really impress me? No. I have personally come to realize that the mind is powerful enough to create a self-illusion of being “cured.” “Ex-gay” therapy offers only mind tricks and the delusion of progress. I know because I played such magic tricks with myself.

I sat peacefully in the prayer circle, nodding in agreement or whispering my “amen,” as different women prayed. As I peeked up, my eyes met those of my church counselor. She was watching me. With a nod and a quick wave of her hand, she instructed me to sit in a more “feminine manner.” This is something we had talked about before, my needing to become more feminine.

I knew I was different at an early age. When my hormones started raging in high school, I didn’t go boy crazy, I fell in love with another girl. When we met, sparks flew. We were both in love for the first time. But this was a small town in the buckle of the Bible Belt during the late ’70s. Society, organized religion and Anita Bryant, all with uncompromising certainty, declared that our kind of love was wrong. As a result, we kept our two-year relationship a secret. We lived in constant fear that someone would find out and label us as lesbians.

By the time I left for college, I was desperate to talk to someone about my relationship and my sexual orientation. As it happened, that someone came in the form of the church counselor. When I told her about my relationship, she said that God did not create me gay and the love I had shared was sinful. She assured me that God could heal me and make me “whole again” — a real woman. She prayed for me, laid her hands on me and rebuked the demonic “spirit of homosexuality” that I had “allowed to control me.” She gave me Bible verses to memorize, told me to avoid temptation and to break off my two-year relationship. She encouraged me to develop “godly” relationships with women — but not too close.

We scheduled time together to work on my femininity. The first afternoon we spent in front of a mirror. I learned how to apply make-up — eyeliner, mascara, eye shadow, lipstick, the works. Another day, she criticized my short, popular Dorothy Hamill haircut that all the girls had. “Let it grow longer,” she said. She told me to rid my closet of my old jeans, sweat pants and gym shorts and replace them with skirts and dresses. My family, particularly my mother and tomboy sister (heterosexual and married now for 20 years), noticed the changes in me. I was zealous in my pursuit of heterosexuality. God would give me a husband, the counselor said.

My church counselor explained that my same-sex attraction was because of either sexual abuse, a flaw in my upbringing or a deficient parent-child relationship. But, try as I might, I could never pinpoint what “made me gay.” I have wonderful, loving parents (married for 45 years now), four brothers and a sister (all heterosexual) and no history of abuse. In the meantime, I prayed, fasted (sometimes for days) and literally begged God to give me an attraction to men.

“I have never felt as complete or peaceful as I have since coming out. I have never felt closer to God.”

For me, the journey of self-acceptance began after almost 15 years of celibacy and intense personal struggle. After years of trying to suppress my sexual orientation, I could not shake a crush on a fellow female congressional staffer. So I decided to seek the help of a mental health professional. It didn’t take long for me to realize that I am a lesbian, and happily so. My therapist said that the church did no more than brainwash me, and I now know that “reparative therapy” — which purports to be able to change one’s sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual — is a lie.

My story is not unique. The reality is that societal prejudice and religious intolerance can drive people to take drastic actions, often with devastating consequences. In my work at the Human Rights Campaign, I have heard horror stories about parents who coerce their children to try to change. One 21-year-old man struggling with his orientation and his church’s “gay deprogramming” recently wrote me. He was raised in a strict religious family who, upon learning of his orientation, threatened to disown him and have him excommunicated unless he changed. He went into the program voluntarily because he couldn’t bear to lose his family, but other young men, he said, were forced against their will after being kidnapped. They strapped him to a chair with electrodes and sensors and showed him pictures of nude men, shocking



him when he became aroused, he said. They continued this until he didn't respond. He finally fled the program after being sexually abused by a male orderly. The experience left him traumatized with incredible feelings of self-hatred, fear and thoughts of suicide. He knows that he is still gay.

I hope the American people will see that these groups who call gay people sinners, telling us we can and should change when we cannot, are simply masking their message of prejudice in religious terms for political and monetary gain. It is unconscionable to me that people use God, religion or "Christian love" as an excuse for name-calling and discrimination. It is simply wrong. As for me, I have never felt as complete or peaceful as I have since coming out. And, I have never felt closer to God.

I was born the son and grandson of Baptist ministers. As a preacher's kid, I was in church every time the doors were open. But at about the same time, I was also having my first homosexual thoughts.

The military — into which my father enlisted as chaplain — moved us to a new state or country every three years. Luckily, I had very loving, encouraging and supportive parents. And being artistic and a good student gave me the confidence to make friends and gain approval each time I moved.

I dated girls frequently in high school and was able to pass for “normal” most of the time, but I knew from the start something was awry when it came to my sexuality. On my 16th birthday, I declined to have sex with a girl, knowing it just wasn't going to happen. At school, I stayed involved in honor societies, theater, art and journalism. This helped me forget that I was attracted to other boys. But I felt left out when all my peers were having crushes, dating people they were attracted to and learning about relationships.

I went on to Baylor University in Texas, the largest Baptist school in the country. I quickly found an exciting (albeit fundamentalist) church and made many friends, many of whom were committed Christians.

However, my internal struggle intensified. Early in my freshman year, I called the university health center inquiring about counseling or procedures to cure homosexuality. This was the most frightening phone call I'd ever made. I trembled so much I could barely get the words out. In my desperate state, I even asked if they would use shock treatment.

I was referred to a Christian psychologist, whom I saw for about a year. This was my first exposure to the “ex-gay” philosophy and I was very nervous, but mildly hopeful. I was told that God could change my sexual orientation. We talked about my parents a lot, attempting to find the cause for my gayness as a result of some supposed flaw in my relationships with them, particularly my father. I was also encouraged to confess all of my homosexual thoughts and actions to a church leader and to speak in tongues. None of these tactics seemed to work.

An early attempt to change was my involvement in an official “ex-gay” ministry in San Antonio affiliated with Exodus International, the umbrella organization for these kinds of groups. This particular ministry was associated with a small non-denominational church, and held weekly support meetings in the “group house.” Several members of the group lived in the house with a “house father.” This arrangement was in hopes that extreme accountability would cure them. Members of the group spent much time searching their pasts for what caused their gayness, presumably some form of trauma or abuse inflicted upon them by their parents or some other family member.

Casting Out Evil Spirits

I returned to college after that summer, more insecure and frustrated than ever. During the next two summers, when I returned to the “ex-gay” group, I found more of my friends had left, unable to change who they were. That particular ministry is now no longer in existence.

Throughout college, even though not a member of an official “ex-gay” group, I continued my quest for heterosexuality. My church espoused all of the “ex-gay” philosophies, and had many concerts and conferences that addressed this issue. Church leaders would pray, oftentimes shouting, for the evil spirits of lust and homosexuality to be cast from me. They would pray for me to be broken, so that I would realize my sin and be healed.

However, I remained a very faithful member of my church. I wouldn't have continued trying to be straight for so long if it hadn't been for everyone around me believing it could happen.

Two years out of college, most of my friends were getting married, becoming missionaries, or being hired onto the church staff. The church leaders to whom I had been accountable all this time weren't seeing a change in me, and no longer knew what to do. I was given an ultimatum concerning my homosexuality. I was told that if I “sinned” in this manner one more time (which consisted of having homosexual thoughts), drastic measures would be taken.



Shake Hands, Don't Hug

I, of course, did “sin” again, and all responsibility and leadership was taken from me. I went to another counselor. And he, as did the “ex-gay” group, believed in healing memories and healing through prayer. I was given more books and pamphlets to read, and I was encouraged to dress and act more masculine. I was told to wear a shirt and tie, get a short haircut, and to sit a particular way. I was also coached on how to react emotionally to situations, especially when male friends were involved. I was told to shake their hands, and not to hug them.

My father had just received an assignment near Washington, D.C., so I focused my attention on getting a job in the area. I was looking forward to being near my parents again, and was excited about what lay ahead. Within two months I landed a great job at a top graphic design firm. Without regrets, I left Texas.

At my new job I had several co-workers who were openly gay and it provided an environment where I was in contact with homosexuals on a daily basis, in a normal, everyday environment. Before that, I had never met an openly gay person. All I ever heard from the “ex-gay” ministries was how lonely, unhappy and depraved gays and lesbians were. But my co-workers had open, happy, responsible lives. I knew I wanted the same.

Eventually, I came out to my closest friends from work and over those first few months, I came out to friends from college and high school. I made new friends (both gay and straight) and began enjoying my new sexual and emotional freedom. Soon I met a man who ended up being my first real relationship. Being able to experience not only physical attraction, but emotional attraction as well, was an exciting, liberating experience. Here I was, infatuated for the first time at 27, when most people have those feelings in junior high. It was an exhilarating time for me.

From the moment I decided to come out, I had known that I would tell my parents. I've always been very open with them and they've always known about every other aspect of my life.

I came out to my family one evening, one member at a time. Each had a distinctly different reaction, from complete surprise to anger. Due to our family's deep religious beliefs, it was difficult for everyone. Over the last couple of years, our love and respect for one another has grown so much. It has opened up communication with my parents I never thought I would have. While they still disagree with homosexuality on a theological level, they've never stopped loving and accepting me. I visit them often, along with my partner of almost three years, Nicholas. We attend graduations and spend holidays together. They love and respect us, and we even receive Christmas gifts as a couple.

I don't know if they'll ever fully accept me as a gay man, but I know they love me and will not reject me as their son. I have come to find that my parents never did anything wrong to make me gay, but they did everything right to make me stand up for who I am.

The reactions I've received from my Christian friends in Texas ranged wildly. Several have said they'll always love me and be my friend, although they believe my “lifestyle” is a sin. One friend asked me to be a groomsman in his wedding then withdrew the invitation after I told him I was gay. Others have ended our friendship unless I change. It's unfortunate that I've lost some friends, but I think it's more important that I've found myself.

My relationship with God and Christ continues to evolve as well. I still believe He has a “calling” on my life. When I go to church, I attend a United Methodist Church that is accepting of gays and lesbians, and allows us to fully participate in all levels of ministry.

Now that I'm honest about my sexuality, I won't say that everything is perfect. But I certainly am more in touch with who I am and feel more alive than I ever have. And I'm looking forward to what's to come.

“All I ever heard from the ‘ex-gay’ ministries was how unhappy gays were. But my new gay co-workers had open, happy, responsible lives. I knew I wanted the same.”

I was a deliverance minister — someone who casts out demons — for 16 years. I went forth in the ministry at age 19 while living in Colorado with my parents. I began with Bible teaching, and then I became the youth pastor of a church in South Florida and even directed the choir on occasions.

I had been raised in a Pentecostal denomination received my preaching credentials in 1984. A year later, I married a man at a church my family and I were attending in Charlotte, N.C., because it was the right thing to do. I was 27 and it was not a very orthodox practice for a woman preacher to be unmarried; being a woman preacher was a strike against me already. We managed to stay married for a year and then went our separate ways.

From there, I was an associate pastor, pastor, evangelist, and finally, a recognized deliverance minister. After returning to my hometown in Alabama, I began a weekly television program with a local Christian network.

Through all of this work, I had built a very successful ministry and I had camouflaged my true self. At a very early age, however, I had seen that true self. When I was a young girl, I realized that, unlike some of my female friends, I was attracted to other girls.

Deliverance ministers believe that a homosexual can be set completely free from same-sex desires by casting out the homosexual demon and evoking the power of Jesus' name. An experienced deliverance minister will "take authority" over the demon and command it to come out of the person's spirit.

I have learned from my extensive experience in casting out demons that "reparative" therapy and "ex-gay" ministries do not work and can greatly harm people. These practices to "help people change" are nothing more than the art of skillfully shaming and brainwashing gays and lesbians into believing that God will not love them as they are. Gays are told that God would rather send them to a place of torment for eternity than accept their sexual orientation.

Efforts to deliver people from homosexuality involve taking Scripture out of context and misusing it as a tool to make gay people feel terrible about themselves. Shame is the bludgeoning tool used by deliverance ministries to make people feel that they need to change. The technique involves breaking people down by drilling into their minds that they are a defilement to human nature. With enough browbeating, these precious souls eventually believe it to be true. But in the end, this grueling exercise ultimately leaves people mentally suicidal and yes, still homosexual.

My entire ministry was based upon my belief that Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation to set us free from all harm. But now I understand that it is not peoples' homosexual orientation, but the "ex-gay" ministries themselves that cause the real harm.

What makes the deliverance ministry so powerful are the omniscient overtones that the minister exudes. The authority and respect the people give the minister is intoxicating. The church services are electrified with emotion as the altar workers direct the prayer lines toward the minister. I knew the format, I knew the songs that move the congregation, and I would direct the musicians in the order in which I wanted the service to go. I knew whatever I said to each individual would be an amazing word of supernatural deliverance because I could quote certain Scriptures at the right moment and the congregation would cheer me on. I could merely tell them to sing, pray or praise God and they would loyally obey.

I had perfected my skill in the art of deliverance. I have seen private deliverance meetings where the ministers took turns yelling at the demons to come out until the individual being prayed for was shaking uncontrollably, sobbing and groaning. But it was not deliverance from demons, but the screaming that made people convulse. Who wouldn't react with the same fear if someone was screaming at them and commanding some foul spirit to come out? This is clearly not a healthy type of prayer meeting.



It was exceptionally difficult for me when a woman came to the altar requesting that I cast away her homosexual demons, because I could not cast this demon from myself.

I was struggling with my own desires and loneliness until I thought I would lose my mind. The Bible teaches that the faith to cast out demons comes by “prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:28, 29), so

“Homosexuality does not go away. This is my testimony.”

over the years I would fast days at a time when these feelings would intensify. I would get up at 2 a.m. and go to church to pray. At 6 a.m. I would return home and shower for work. In desperation, I would secretly travel to revival meetings at out-of-town churches where people did not know me to seek my own deliverance. I did this for years over the course of my ministry until I could no longer stand the divided life and hypocrisy.

If deliverance from homosexual feelings was possible, then I was the perfect candidate. I have sought God earnestly and sincerely my entire life, and have struggled for years to be free from these feelings. Six years ago I realized God made me this way and since then, I have never been happier with myself.

If I had not experienced the desires, temptations, falls, struggles and non-deliverance, I would probably still conclude that a homosexual could be delivered from same-sex attractions. But I have learned that you cannot fast and pray away a part of yourself. Homosexuality does not go away. This is my testimony.

Homosexuality is the natural affection for us and to go against it is unnatural. From my vast experience as a deliverance minister, you can be celibate or in denial, but there is no such thing as “ex-gay.”

By the time I was 19, I had spent almost half of my life begging God to free me from my homosexuality. I did whatever it took not to be gay — including prayer, fasting, intensive Bible study and exorcisms. I was convinced that if only I could attain the mind of Christ then the homosexual feelings would be removed.

I grew up in Parker, a very small town in the desert of western Arizona. I was very active as a youth in Boy Scouts, 4-H, band and motorcycle riding. I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal lord and savior when I was in grade school and from that time on my only desire was to live a life pleasing to God. My family worshiped at the Assembly of God in town, a church where we believed in the infallibility of the Scriptures and in the power of God.

I began to realize that I was different from the other kids when I was in fifth grade. But it would be several years before I came to understand what that actually meant. By the time I entered high school, I realized that the “difference” I felt was an attraction to other guys. This was a devastating discovery for me, for I had been raised to believe that homosexuality was in direct opposition to what God had willed for my life. But I had also been raised to believe that if I had ample faith and prayed enough, God would answer my prayers and free me from what I thought was the bondage of homosexuality.

What I could not understand through all those years was how God could allow this to happen to me. What had I done, or what was I not doing, that had caused me to have such an intense struggle in my life? As I grew up and grew in my faith, I saw God do amazing things in all areas of my life, but for some reason there was never any lasting progress toward my becoming a straight person.

I was in church a minimum of three times a week. I participated in Sunday school, Sunday morning worship, Sunday evening worship, church orchestra rehearsal, Wednesday night Bible study and youth group. I was determined to not give myself any time to be tempted with homosexual feelings. This didn't work. The simple desire to love another man was always there.

In 1985, I moved to Phoenix for summer break from University of Arizona in Tucson to attend Homosexuals Anonymous meetings. Once in Phoenix, I took a job in roofing construction, figuring the combination of physical hard work and spiritual hard work would help. Every week, I attended two meetings, met with a sponsor, went to Christian counseling and attended church.

At meetings, I found a community of other men and women who were all facing the same struggles and all shared a deep desire to please God. I felt real hope for genuine change. We would always open with prayer and then spend time sharing our struggles and progress. It was a small group and a very safe environment where I could be completely honest about who I was and the things going on in my life.

Homosexuals Anonymous is a self-help recovery group with 14 steps. We were taught that God did not create us to be gay but rather we were really heterosexual people who had been deceived into believing that we were gay. They made it clear that if I just trusted God enough, He would heal me and restore my true identity.

The group emphasized over and over how dangerous it would be for us to go back into what they called the “homosexual death-style.” There were people in the group who had been involved with the “ex-gay” ministries for five or more years. Over the summer, I came to the harsh realization that not one of them had been changed. They were just as gay as the day they had walked in the door — they just hated themselves more for believing they had failed God.

All I had to do was look around the room to see the truth about the “ex-gay” experience. In the Bible, we are promised abundant life in Christ, but this was not abundant life. I realized that if I didn't get out of the constant struggle and torment it would kill me spiritually and physically. I left HA and decided to no longer try to change who I was, though I was still unable to accept myself as a gay person.



When I returned to Tucson, I confided in a few members of my church about what had happened. Within a couple of weeks, it was made clear that I should find somewhere else to worship. I couldn't believe that I was being kicked out of my own church family. This was the most devastating thing that could have happened to me. I had nothing left and no one to whom to turn. I was

“My parents
have grown right
along with me.”

extremely angry and left the church entirely. I sent my Bible and all my Christian music tapes back home to my parents' house and refused to have anything to do with religion or Christianity. These feelings lasted for a couple of years.

It is strange, but the entire time I was away from the church I felt God's presence deep down inside. When I finally decided I had to take a chance on God again, He was indeed there waiting with patient loving arms. I started attending church once again and began an extended time of intensive Bible study, re-examining the Scriptures I had been raised to believe said God hated homosexuality. It was not an easy journey. It took a long time to rebuild my spiritual self-respect but I'm now able to realize the wonderful truth: God loves me just the way He created me.

My parents have grown right along with me. They now love and accept me as the Christian son they raised, one who just happens to be gay. I've finally realized the audacity was not in me accepting myself as a Christian who is gay. The audacity was my telling God that He had made a mistake in how He created me.

I have been able to discover the true power of God's love and what it means to live an abundant life only after I was able to accept myself as the man God created me to be.

As I age, there are few things of which I remain certain. Of one thing I am consistently certain: God created me and God loves me. A former minister, I know one's faith is a key component of self-identification. I know the power to impact someone's faith is a great and awesome power. Indeed, the power to set up a religious system and pronounce people "qualified" or "unqualified" is one of the world's greatest powers. This power and its abuse is what lies at the heart of the religious right's battle with homosexuality.

This is not my personal "coming out" story. This is a story about my experience with so-called "reparative therapy." And it is about how I fought healthy self-acceptance with every fiber of my being.

Looking back over my years in college, I now realize the depth of my self-denial about my sexuality. At the age of 22, while I was still living in that denial, I married a wonderful woman. Less than a year later, I was in a full-time position as a minister. Within two years of being married, both my wife and I were miserable.

Then, as now, I loved my God with a great intensity. My definition of self was wrapped up in a teaching that pronounced all of creation good. My goals for life were driven by a very literal translation of Scripture. Homosexuality did not fit into this picture. My mind is filled with memories of preachers and Bible class teachers pronouncing homosexuality as being both sinful and as something to be avoided.

Many people who call themselves Christian believe it is fairly simple to determine whether or not one is a "true" Christian. The test involves watching the person in question and evaluating their actions in light of someone else's view of Christianity. The justification for this is a statement accredited to Christ.

The Apostle Matthew records Jesus as saying "By their fruit you will recognize them." In this argument, if a person claims to be a Christian yet lives (or acts, dresses, talks, etc.) differently than how certain people define Christianity, then he or she is not a true Christian. The result is the need to constantly worry and evaluate

one's behavior. This is particularly important if one is a homosexual and finds himself or herself in a religious system that condemns homosexuals.

At the age of 24, this was my world. I had become very adept at lying, distorting the truth and presenting an image of myself that I thought would insure the acceptance of my family, my friends, and ultimately my God. Of course, I didn't like this person either.

My response was to gather as much information as possible. I read many books and articles and ended up in the office of a Christian psychologist who told me the words I wanted to hear: Change was possible. Unfortunately this change did not involve developing a healthy self-esteem. What it did involve was determining why I was having these feelings. Having determined why I had these feelings would enable me to make peace with the internal conflict and the feelings would, naturally, resolve.

The Public Person, The Private Person

As time passed, the dichotomy in my life continued. There was the public person who seemed like a perfectly acceptable, average, heterosexual male. The private person knew the reality: The more I learned about myself, the more I realized I was not a heterosexual male. Nothing was being resolved. The deceptive, destructive behavior continued.

My therapy sessions continued, as well. Aside from dealing with the issues in my past, I was told that it was important to not "self-identify" as a homosexual, as it would lead to an easier acceptance of one's homosexuality. I was struggling to deal with my own identity, and the men and women to whom I had turned for help were telling me it was dangerous to fully explore my own inner self. The man who was looking in the mirror came to loathe himself even more.

The self-loathing continued. I was becoming more and more depressed and self-destructive. To deal with this depression, my therapist suggested I become involved with a group known as



“We had spent literally thousands of dollars on therapy that didn’t, and couldn’t, do what it advertised.”

Exodus International. The group of men and women with whom I found myself were told we didn’t understand sexual development properly. The goal, I soon learned, was not to educate me but to suppress my sexuality.

The depression finally forced me to listen to what I was being told. The best advice I received was not from people who identified themselves as “Christian” psychologists. One woman gave me the words I needed to hear. She told me that I needed to accept myself.

Her words gave me the freedom I needed to become acquainted with myself for the first time.

Even in the darkest days of my struggle for understanding and acceptance my God was someone whom I warmly embraced. I believed with all my heart that God had created a good creation. If God could create us and pronounce us “good” then how could this God condemn how I had been created? Accepting the goodness of creation — what I had long understood and believed — allowed me to begin accepting my reality.

My wife, who went through therapy with me, finally had the courage to end our marriage. While I had been struggling with my own self-acceptance, she was struggling with the emotional weight of being married to a gay male. I admire her courage and I am thankful for what she did because it set me firmly on the road to self-acceptance.

The price of being emotionally boxed in by such a suffocating system could be seen quite clearly. The woman I been married to for seven years had to pick up the pieces of her own life. We had spent literally thousands of dollars on therapy that didn’t, and couldn’t, do what it advertised. Ultimately, there are the two wonderful children who were produced from our marriage. They are the ones who will have to come to grips with what happened. The toll is staggering.

It is a never-ending journey and it is one we all must take. For only in taking this journey do we learn the true value of who and what we are. And when we accept this truth, the world is a better and greater place for us all.

“We’re standing for the truth that homosexuals can change,” the ad begins. I could hardly miss its full-page proclamation in *The Los Angeles Times*. Shocked and angered, I forced myself to read it through. As a Christian man who spent five years in “ex-gay” ministries, I did not find the change described in the ad to be possible or desirable. Instead, I found it repressive and harmful.

As a very young man, I realized there was something different about me. I displayed effeminate characteristics that made it difficult for me to relate to the majority of boys my age. I was in sixth grade when I first heard about gay people and began to wonder if I was one of them. At 12, I finally said the words to myself. There was no denying it. My passion, both as emotional longing and a desire for physical contact, was for men and men alone.

“I’m gay,” I mouthed quietly to myself. No two words could have brought more despair and desperation to my heart than these. Acknowledging my gayness seemed a sentence of ultimate isolation, complete with social and religious implications. The lives of everyone in my family were tied intimately to church. I was a seventh-generation member of our denomination, which taught that homosexuality was unconditionally sinful. Since I was a child of faith and belief, I could never follow the longings of my heart. My apparent choice was isolation or hellfire. I told no one of my struggle and, at the age of 12, I began to long for death.

My adolescence was one of desperate loneliness and detachment from both family and peers. I just couldn’t let anyone close for fear they might figure me out. I went from secret crush to secret crush. I longed for a relationship with a man, but I believed that I would never live out that dream. I came forward to the altar in tears countless times. A high school teacher made a careless remark that he thought homosexuality was the result of a nagging mother, and so I began a hate campaign toward my mom that baffled, angered and frustrated my family.

The first time I walked into the counseling office it was a terrifying experience. My counselor was a Christian and I was able to see him for free as a pre-seminary student at Abilene Christian University. “Why are you here?” he asked. I looked at the floor and barely whispered. “I’m a homosexual and I don’t want to be. Can I change?” My new counselor told me that I could. “Do you think I’ll be straight by the end of the semester?” I asked. He said it was possible. He spoke of dedication and faith.

Confident and determined to become heterosexual, I began my five years of reparative therapy. My counselor acquainted me with Exodus International, a conservative Christian organization dedicated to the idea that gay people can become straight through psychotherapy and prayer. The cornerstone of their psychotherapy is the theory that people are gay because of a breakdown in the relationship with their same-sex parent.

‘... And Presto! I’d be Straight.’

An integral aspect of therapy was to develop an extremely close, non-sexual relationship with a straight man. The idea was that this man would become my emotional surrogate father. Since I was in love with a straight man at the time, one of the few I had told of my struggle and who had expressed his support of my decision to change, I thought he’d be perfect for the job. Once my needs for fathering were met, my natural heterosexual urges would supplant my homosexual ones and presto! I’d be straight.

In addition to my individual therapy, which was twice a week, I also attended meetings with a small group of men at the university. Our self-loathing of our sexuality was the common thread. We were a terrified, hopelessly ashamed little circle. Several were like me, and had never even kissed another man. Others were caught in addictive patterns of anonymous sex. No one had actually lived as an openly homosexual person.

A primary source of anxiety for our group was that others would know of our struggle with homosexuality at the university. Once, a straight guy blundered into our meeting, thinking it was a



different support group. Well into our meeting, he asked, “Are you all gay? I think I’m in the wrong place.” We were terrified of being publicly “outed.” One member of our group even experienced horrible bouts of stress-related diarrhea and vomiting after this episode.

Initially, life as an “ex-gay” had an element of excitement and liberation. For the first time, I did not feel isolated. I met other men who knew my shame and struggle, as well as my faith and hope. I found myself in a huge network of support, and I began to search out other “ex-gay” men and women wherever I could.

A month into my therapy, my counselor gave me the phone number of an Exodus-affiliated minister in my denomination. The next day, I drove 14 hours to Nashville, skipping a week of classes to spend time with him. Once there, I finally felt supported and understood. Six months into it all, a roommate introduced me to a group of people, mostly “ex-gays,” some of whom lived in Abilene, Texas, as well as in Oklahoma and Kansas.

When I spent a summer in Los Angeles, I met the leaders of Desert Stream, the largest “ex-gay” ministry in Southern California, and went to their conference. I became so committed to their method of therapy which was based on prayer, confession and miraculous acts of the Holy Spirit, that upon my return to Abilene, I convinced my counselor to buy their material for our group. My

“I felt that God was crushing me, killing me with a threat of hell over something that, to me, seemed innate.”

life was centered on becoming straight. I went to therapy twice a week and group once a week. I read approximately 50 books on the subject. I attended about five conferences on reparative therapy. I had hundreds upon hundreds of prayer sessions, some which lasted all night. I confessed every fantasy and experience of attraction. I was bathed in holy water and holy oil. I was baptized twice.

I can’t count how many times I drove to Oklahoma, listening to tapes of “ex-gay” speakers on the way. I went to Nashville two more times. In therapy, I dealt with issues in my family, issues of isolation, rejection and a hopelessly low self-image. Despite the fact that I now

believe my counselor was misguided in his ideas about homosexuality, he was full of compassion and therapeutic expertise. I began to love myself, very tentatively and I began to actually feel joy from time to time. My parents came and met with my counselor at different times. I eventually told my mom about my struggle. She reacted with disbelief and told me never to speak of it to her again.

The session with her and my counselor was a fiery one. I began to work through my rage toward my father as well and began to repair the relationship with him, which took several years. I also continued to cultivate friendships with straight men and learn how to do “guy” things — playing basketball and fixing cars, both of which are very important aspects of reparative therapy. I became a leader at my church and even spoke out publicly on how God was liberating me from homosexuality. I enrolled in the seminary and planned to become an “ex-gay” minister and evangelist myself. Men and women at my church began to come to me for prayer and support in their own struggles.

A Longing for Emotional and Physical Intimacy

Four and a half years into my reparative therapy, I began to question its effectiveness. I had undoubtedly benefited from my experiences. I was somewhat happier. Love and communication characterized my relationships with my family members. My self-image was beginning to build. The moments of joy were longer and more frequent. I had become a responsible student. I was no longer suicidal. My shame at being gay as well as my feelings of isolation were much less. However, because of my newfound strength, I began to look at some of my beliefs and my behaviors in a different light.

First, it was undeniable that I was still gay. Though I had never even kissed a man, my longing for both emotional and physical intimacy with one was almost overpowering. Despite all of the prayer, confession and therapy, nothing changed that fact. Any romantic movie or play sent me into melancholy contemplation of men. I recall spending a December evening with an attractive “ex-

gay” man decorating his Christmas tree, feeling so domestic, and thinking, if this could only be a real relationship.

Second, by now I realized that the transformation to heterosexuality was a fleeting thing. None of the “ex-gay” poster children whom I had questioned, most of whom were married and parents, seemed to genuinely have lost their homosexual longings. They still struggled.

Of the several hundred people in “ex-gay” ministries I have met, at conferences, groups and my own fledgling ministry, I never met anyone who had overcome his or her desire to be with people of the same sex. So many people in my groups were depressed and involved in addictive sexual behavior.

A relationship with a wonderful woman convinced me to leave “ex-gay” ministries behind forever. It was not the first time I had dated women, or expressed interest in them, but it was the first time I had experienced anything approaching a real romantic relationship with one. Our relationship

“I will continue to search for God through honesty as a gay man.”

filled me with pride and made me feel masculine, but I had no more physical attraction for her than any other woman. She could offer friendship, but not the emotional completion that a man could. It was not that she just wasn't the right woman.

After a month and a half of dating, we let our relationship fizzle. I wanted love, and I just could not receive it from any woman. I had always told myself that love for me would be heterosexual or nothing, but this belief had driven me to despair. I needed to rethink my beliefs in God and my ideas on homosexuality. I moved back to California and got a job in a children's home in Chino near my parents.

It was a time of reflection and spiritual limbo. I still did not reach out to the gay community, though I knew better than to try to date women. In “ex-gay” circles, the “homosexual lifestyle” is spoken of as a miserable, pointless existence. So, I was hesitant to make contact with the gay community. Finally, though, I realized that I had to.

I had known of West Hollywood, an area famous for its large gay community. One evening, a close straight friend offered to go with me. After walking up and down the street, we ended up at dance club. Although the sensuality I saw there was overwhelming, I felt that somehow, finally, I was among my own kind. It was a magical night. It was even more magical a couple of weeks later when I had my first date with a man. The sexual tension I had run away from for so long was exciting as well as challenging. There is a certain experience of wholeness that a young straight boy feels by just touching a girl's hand. For the first time, I too felt that inner completion.

I will not lie and say that life as a gay man is all champagne and dessert. There have been struggles with body image, sex, intimacy and love. I have had struggles regarding the healing of my trust in God and divine power. These struggles, however, are honest. I know that being gay is part of my deepest self, and that I cannot continue to grow as an individual as long as I live behind the closet door.

Now I am strong enough to take the risks of painful rejection, intimacy and physical involvement. Romantic involvement with other men is incomparably satisfying. It brings me into areas of maturity and self-knowledge that I could never experience any other way. My new life has also brought a peace and happiness that I have never known before. The violent fantasies that plagued me have been dispelled.

I found the promises of “ex-gay” ministries shallow and without foundation. My mental health was clearly compromised by my attempts to resist my true nature as a gay man. As I explore my nature, I reach new pinnacles of relationship, responsibility and spiritual fulfillment. I will never go back to the shame, self-alienation and anguish of the “ex-gay” life. I will continue to search for God through honesty as a gay man. I hope anyone behind the closet door will do the same.

What Mental Health And Medical Experts Say About ‘Curing’ Gays

The psychological, medical and psychiatric establishments agree that sexual orientation cannot be changed, and that so-called “reparative therapy” aimed at altering gay peoples’ orientations does not work and may, in fact, be harmful.

Here are some excerpts from position papers on this subject by the leading professional associations:

American Psychiatric Association

The potential risks of “reparative therapy” are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient. Many patients who have undergone ‘reparative therapy’ relate that they were inaccurately told that homosexuals are lonely, unhappy individuals who never achieve acceptance or satisfaction. The possibility that the person might achieve happiness and satisfying interpersonal relationships as a gay man or lesbian is not presented, nor are alternative approaches to dealing with the effects of societal stigmatization discussed ... the APA opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as “reparative” or “conversion” therapy which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based on a prior assumption that the patient should change his/her sexual orientation.¹

There is no published scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of “reparative therapy” as a treatment to change one’s sexual orientation. It is not described in the scientific literature, nor is it mentioned in the APA’s latest comprehensive Task Force Report, *Treatments of Psychiatric Disorders* (1989).²

There are a few reports in the literature of efforts to use psychotherapeutic and counseling techniques to treat persons troubled by their homosexuality who desire to become heterosexual; however, results have not been conclusive, nor have they been replicated. There is no evidence that any treatment can change a homosexual person’s deep-seated sexual feelings for others of the same sex.²

Clinical experience suggests that any person who seeks conversion therapy may be doing so because of social bias that has resulted in internalized homophobia, and that gay men and lesbians who have accepted their sexual orientation positively are better adjusted than those who have not done so.²

American Psychological Association³

Even though homosexual orientation is not a mental illness and there is no scientific reason to attempt conversion of lesbians or gays to heterosexual orientation, some individuals may seek to change their sexual orientation or that of another individual (for example, parents seeking therapy for their child). Some therapists who undertake this kind of therapy report that they have changed their clients’ sexual orientation (from homosexual to heterosexual) in treatment. Close scrutiny of their reports indicates several factors that cast doubt: Many of the claims come from organizations with an ideological perspective on sexual orientation, rather than from mental health researchers; the treatments and their outcomes are poorly documented; and the length of time that clients are followed up on after treatment is too short.

In 1990, the American Psychological Association stated that scientific evidence does not show that conversion therapy works and that it can do more harm than good. Changing one’s sexual orientation is not simply a matter of changing one’s sexual behavior. It would require altering one’s emotional, romantic and sexual feelings and restructuring one’s self-concept and social identity.

Although some mental health providers do attempt sexual orientation conversion, others question the ethics of trying to alter through therapy a trait that is not a disorder to an individual’s identity.

Not all gays and lesbians who seek therapy want to change their sexual orientation. Gays and lesbians may seek counseling for any of the same reasons as anyone else. In addition, they may seek psychological help to ‘come out’ or to deal with prejudice, discrimination and violence.

American Academy of Pediatrics⁴

Confusion about sexual orientation is not unusual during adolescence. Counseling may be helpful for young

people who are uncertain about their sexual orientation or for those who are uncertain about how to express their sexuality and might profit from an attempt at clarification through a counseling or psychotherapeutic initiative. Therapy directed specifically at changing sexual orientation is contraindicated, since it can provoke guilt and anxiety while having little or no potential for achieving changes in orientation.

Pediatricians should be aware that some of the youths in their care may be homosexual or have concerns about sexual orientation. Care givers should provide factual, current, nonjudgmental information in a confidential manner.

The psychosocial problems of gay and lesbian adolescents are primarily the result of societal stigma, hostility, hatred and isolation. The gravity of these stresses is underscored by current data that document that gay youths account for up to 30 percent of all completed adolescent suicides. Approximately 30 percent of a surveyed group of gay and bisexual males have attempted suicide at least once. Adolescents struggling with issues of sexual preference should be reassured that they will gradually form their own identity and that there is no need for premature labeling of one's sexual orientation.

on physiological causes but rather is due more to a sense of alienation in an unaccepting environment. For this reason, aversion therapy (a behavioral or medical intervention which pairs unwanted behavior, in this case, homosexual behavior, with unpleasant sensations or aversive consequences) is no longer recommended for gay men and lesbians. Through psychotherapy, gay men and lesbians can become comfortable with their sexual orientation and understand the societal response to it.

Endnotes

- 1 American Psychiatric Association position statement, December 1998.
- 2 American Psychiatric Association fact sheet, September 1994.
- 3 American Psychological Association resolution on "reparative therapy," Aug. 14, 1997.
- 4 American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement, "Homosexuality and Adolescence," *Pediatrics*, October 1993.
- 5 From "Health Care Needs of Gay Men and Lesbians in the U.S.: A Report Presented by the Council on Scientific Affairs to the AMA House of Delegates Interim Meeting," December 1994.

American Medical Association⁵

Most of the emotional disturbance experienced by gay men and lesbians around their sexual identity is not based

A Victim of the "Ex-Gay" Ministries? TELL YOUR STORY.

E-mail your story to: hrc@hrc.org or mail the following information to the address below.
(This form is also available at www.hrc.org.)

Human Rights Campaign/Finally Free
919 18th St., N.W., Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20006

PLEASE FILL OUT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:
(Information is kept confidential. We will only publish information with permission from the author.)

First Name Last Name

Home Phone Work Phone

Fax E-Mail

Address City State Zip

Sex/Gender Identity Age Current Job

1) In what program(s) were you involved and what city(ies) (e.g. Homosexuals Anonymous, Desert Stream)?

2) How long were you involved in an 'ex-gay' ministry(ies)? _____

3) How old were you when you "came out" (acknowledged you were gay)? _____

4) How old were you when you started in an "ex-gay" ministry? How old were you when you left? _____

5) Were you ever forced to attend these ministries against your will? _____

6) Which of the following did you experience while attending these ministries? (Check all that apply):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shock treatment (a.k.a. aversion therapy) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual advances made by group leader(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual abuse by group leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Exorcism(s), and if so, how many? _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Femininity exercises (lesbians) | <input type="checkbox"/> Masculinity exercises (gay men) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Suicidal feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> Attempted suicide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-inflicted mutilation | <input type="checkbox"/> Lowered self-esteem |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings that God let you down | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above |

Other (please describe) _____

7) Do you know anyone who committed or attempted suicide while involved with these ministries? _____

8) Were you sexually active with same-sex partners while involved in these ministries? _____

9) Did you ever have to pay for “reparative therapy” treatment? If so, how much did it cost per session? _____

How many times a week did you have to attend therapy? _____

10) What kind of a “therapist” were you seeing?

Psychiatrist Psychologist Social worker Counselor Pastoral counselor Minister Other

11) Did you ever marry or get engaged as a result of pressure from “ex-gay” ministries? If yes, how long were you married?

If you were married, how many children resulted from the marriage? _____

13) If you were married, are you now divorced? _____

14) Have you ever been a public spokesperson for an “ex-gay” ministry? _____

15) Are you now willing to tell your story to the media? _____

16) What percent of the people with whom you were enrolled in the “ex-gay” ministries do you estimate

consider themselves gay now? _____

17) Do you know of any other former “ex-gays” whom we could contact? Please provide contact information.

18) Using the testimonials in “Finally Free” as a guide, please share your experience. (Approximately 1-3 pages suggested.)

Resources

Affirmation (United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Concerns) www.umaffirm.org
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, Ill. 60204
Mission: Affirmation is an independent, not-for-profit organization that works toward a Methodist Church which acknowledges and affirms all the God's people who are part of the body of Christ including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons.

Dignity/USA www.dignityusa.org
1500 Mass. Ave. N.W., Suite 11
Washington, D.C. 20005-1894
Ph: (800) 877-8797
Mission: Dignity/USA envisions and works for a time when gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Catholics are affirmed and experience dignity through the integration of their spirituality with their sexuality, and as beloved persons of God participate fully in all aspects of life within the church and society.

Evangelicals Concerned www.ecwr.org
P.O. Box 19734
Seattle, Wash. 98109-6734
Ph: (206) 621-8960
Mission: Evangelicals Concerned is a non-denominational evangelical resource providing a community of fellowship that is a safe place for gay and lesbian Christians to reconcile their faith and sexuality, and to grow towards Christian maturity.

Human Rights Campaign www.hrc.org
919 18th St., N.W., Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20006
Ph: (202) 628-4160
Mission: The Human Rights Campaign is the nation's largest national lesbian and gay political organization with members throughout the country. HRC effectively lobbies Congress, provides campaign support and educates the public to ensure that lesbian and gay Americans can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community.

Lutherans Concerned/North America www.lcna.org
E-mail: luthconca@aol.com
Mission: Lutherans Concerned helps people reconcile their spirituality and sexuality in an uplifting way, and seeks to lead the church by example.

More Light Presbyterians www.mlp.org
PMB 246
4737 County Rd. 101
Minnetonka, Minn. 55345-2634
Ph: (505) 820-7082
Mission: More Light Presbyterians seeks the full participation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people of faith in the life of the Presbyterian church (USA).

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays www.pflag.org
1726 M St., N.W., Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036
Ph: (202) 467-8180
Mission: Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights.

Soulforce Inc. www.soulforce.org
P.O. Box 4467
Laguna Beach, Calif. 92652
Mission: Soulforce Inc. is a network of friends learning nonviolence from the teachings of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. to seek justice for God's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered children.

UFMCC World Center
(Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches) www.ufmcc.com
8704 Santa Monica Blvd., 2nd Floor
West Hollywood, Calif. 90069
Ph: (310) 360-8640
Mission: The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches helps thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and heterosexual people find hope and live the joy, reverence and excitement of our fellowship and faith in God. UFMCC provides communities of faith that are places of healing and hope, places of reconciliation with family, with self-esteem and with individual spirituality.

United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns www.coalition.simplenet.com
E-mail: mnecoalition@snet.net
Mission: The United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns is an officially-recognized interest group of the United Church of Christ, composed of justice seeking individuals.

HRC SENIOR STAFF

Elizabeth Birch

Executive Director

Margaret Conway

Managing Director

Kim I. Mills

Education Director

Cathy Nelson

Development Director

David M. Smith

*Communications Director and
Senior Strategist*

Seth Kilbourn

National Field Director

Winnie Stachelberg

Political Director

Anthony E. Varona

General Counsel and Legal Director

HRC FOUNDATION BOARD

Vic Basile

Edith Dee Cofrin

Hilary Rosen

Andrea Sharrin

The Human Rights Campaign envisions an America where lesbians and gay people are ensured of their basic equal rights — and can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community.

©July 2000 by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. HRC grants permission for the reproduction and redistribution of this publication only when reproduced in its entirety and distributed free of charge. The Human Rights Campaign name and Equality logo are trademarks of the Human Rights Campaign.

“I entered the ‘ex-gay’ ministries because I believed I was going to hell. I left when I realized that hell was **life in the ‘ex-gay’ ministries.**” —Tracey St. Pierre



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION