

“Is it because my dad’s gay?” I’d never even formulated that thought in my own mind, let alone spoken it out loud, but there it was. How did I know that?

IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

By Emily Pearson

I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE WHAT I WAS HEARING. IT was the summer of 1983. I was fifteen years old, sitting in a small amphitheater with my family at Aspen Grove Family Camp in Utah, listening to the home evening message of a well-known General Authority: “That’s right, brothers and sisters, I am referring to the mother of all evil, putrid, and vile sins—*homosexuality*. You know, Satan himself is a homosexual. That is why he so desperately desires the souls of all these young men that have fallen into his grasp.”

I felt sick to my stomach and began trembling with rage. While I had known for several years that my own father was gay, and that his homosexuality had been the cause of my parents’ divorce five years earlier, I had never gotten used to hearing comments about how evil and sinful he was, or that he would be better off at the bottom of the ocean with a millstone around his neck than living life as an openly gay man.

I had been born in Provo, Utah, the oldest of four children to Gerald and Carol Lynn Pearson. Before my birth, my dad had borrowed two thousand dollars to publish a book of my mother’s poetry, and it had sold by the thousands—making my mom a relatively famous figure in Mormondom. I had long been accustomed to crying women accosting her in public and asking me if I knew how lucky I was to have the mother I had. I *did* know how lucky I was. I still do. My mother has always been a huge presence in my life—her love, her humor, her strength, her talent, her fame. There has been only one person I have ever known that was capable of eclipsing her. My dad. And he did it, every time, in the blink of an eye.

How do I even begin to describe Gerald Pearson? Take all of the attention and adoration that my mom received outside our house, multiply it by thousands, and that was how we all felt about my dad. My mom and my brothers adored my dad, but I . . . I *worshipped* the water he walked on. My daddy was every-

thing. With the exception of when Mom was being Carol Lynn Pearson, my dad was the center of attention everywhere we went. No matter what the situation was, he entered any room, anywhere, like a comet.

Our family was a normal and happy one. Mornings began with our parents’ voices shouting, “Hugging time!” followed by the sound of feet stampeding into their bedroom. We knew dinner was officially over when the world’s greatest playmate threw his head back, stretched out his arms, yawned, then bolted upright, singing, “Wrestling time!” as he raced from the table.

Dramatic creativity oozed in, around, and out of our house. Family Home Evenings always included dancing, reciting poetry and Shakespeare, sculpting homemade playdough, painting, and performing original, highly experimental piano compositions. And, of course, there were many, many lessons about the gospel, God, and about being honest and Christ-like.

As a little girl, I was devoted to the Church. I loved Heavenly Father with all of my little heart and soul and hungrily digested everything I was taught. I took every talk, every lesson, and every scripture I was read seriously and literally. One Sunday, the lesson was on the signs and events that will lead up to the millennium. “When Jesus returns,” said my teacher (whose white hair had a very distinct bluish hue) in her most cheerful, sing-song voice, “all of the non-members—those are people that don’t belong to our church—will be burned to stubble. That is why it is called ‘the great and dreadful day.’ It will be great for those of us who are righteous and dreadful for those who are not.”

I was horrified. All of my little friends at school who weren’t Mormon were going to catch on fire? I cried and cried while Mom sat with me in the car trying to convince me that it just wasn’t true. But I wouldn’t believe her. It was taught at church—it *had* to be true. I don’t know why I was willing to believe Sister Bluehair over my mom, but I was.

I N 1976, MY parents surprised us with the news that we were moving to California. My dad acted like we’d just won the lottery. His enthusiasm was infectious. Excitedly, we packed up our belongings and said goodbye to our friends.



EMILY PEARSON is a professional actress, a writer with two books currently in production, and the co-founder of Wildflowers (www.wewildflowers.com), a support network for women currently or formerly married to gay men. You can contact Emily directly at emily@emilypearson.net.

Dad left early with the moving van while Amtrack transported the rest of us to our new life in the San Francisco Bay Area.

A couple of weeks after we settled into our new house, my dad summoned me into his makeshift office in the garage and we snuggled on one of the large corduroy cushions. "Emmy, you know I love you very much, don't you? Now that you're eight, you're going to be baptized an official member of the Church, and I know what a big deal that is for you." He cleared his throat. "I am making some different choices about church for myself, and... I'm not going to be able to baptize you. Your Uncle David's going to do it. Will that be okay, sweetheart?"

My dad wasn't going to baptize me? No, it wasn't okay. It wasn't okay at all. I didn't understand. I looked at him with confusion, but he didn't say another word. He just gathered me tighter in his arms and cried as though the world were ending.

From that day on, I became more and more aware that something was changing. My dad had taken a job as a chef for Scott's Seafood Bar and Grill in San Francisco, so he wasn't home very much any more. And he looked different. He had always been very good looking but hadn't seemed to care that much about it before. Suddenly he was getting dressed up and wearing cologne every time he went into the city. My mom, on the other hand, had cut off her long, beautiful, prematurely gray hair, stopped wearing make-up, and looked older and more tired all the time. My dad was coming to life in California, but my mom . . . wasn't.

Following the success of her musical play, *My Turn on Earth*, Mom bought a new house the summer I turned ten. Strangely, no one actually acknowledged the fact that our dad didn't move to the new house, too. He was made a junior partner at the restaurant and had to close really late every night, so he rented an apartment in San Francisco. He'd only been coming home a couple of days a week anyway; so, weird as it may sound, I was blissfully oblivious to the fact that my dad didn't live with us anymore.

Later that year, on a cozy December Saturday afternoon, while my little sister Katy was still down for a nap, the boys played a game on the carpet, and I was cuddled in my dad's lap, Mom walked in with two full plates of chocolate chip cookies.



*I couldn't please, or
be loved by, both fathers.
I had to choose.
So, of course, I chose
my dad. He was
immediate, tangible,
and bigger and louder
to me than anything.*

"Well, kids," my mom sat on the hearth and took a deep breath, "we have some things we need to talk about. Your dad's schedule is lightening up at work."

"Yeah, I'll be able to come out and spend more time with you. But I'm going to keep my apartment in the city."

"We're still a family," Mom continued, "We'll always be a family, but there are some changes you need to know about. Your dad and I have decided that we can better support one another, and be happier, as best friends instead of husband and wife."

"You mean like . . . a divorce?" The cookie turned to sawdust in my mouth. I couldn't swallow. My dad held me tighter.

"Yes, Em, like a divorce."

"But why?" I demanded, "I've never even heard you guys fight, not even once!"

And it's true. I had never heard my parents fight. Divorce only happened to other kids' parents who yelled and screamed and hit each other, didn't it? My parents didn't do any of those things. My parents had always been fine. Hadn't they?

Eventually the shock began to lessen, but the confusion didn't. *Why* were they getting divorced? I *needed* to know. They wouldn't give me any satisfactory answers, and it wasn't fair. At first I thought the world would stop turning without my dad. But he still came out to visit one night a week and most Saturdays. Often he brought new friends with him, and they helped with yard work or stuff that needed to be done around the house. He still cooked gourmet meals for us, and we still had wrestling and tickling time. I had to admit to myself that not really that much had changed, that maybe things were going to be okay after all.

To ensure that we felt like we were still a family, my parents took us on family outings together all over the city—to the Japanese Tea Gardens, Golden Gate Park, Union Square, Fisherman's Wharf, and Chinatown. One night, we were at the Chinese New Year parade going nuts over the fire-crackers, lights, dancing, music, and the colored dragon puppets, when suddenly, right in the middle of the parade, marched a group of men in T-shirts, tight jeans, and very short Caesar haircuts. They were waving rainbow flags.

"We're here, we're queer! Get used to it!"

What did that mean?

"We're here, we're queer! Get used to it!"

What did *queer* mean?

"We're here, we're queer! Get used to it!"

Who were those men? Suddenly we recognized one of the friends Dad had brought over to our house.

"Dad! There's your friend! Mom, look! There's Daddy's friend!"

But our dad had vanished and was nowhere to be seen. Why did my mom have that look on her face?

"We're here, we're queer! Get used to it!"

MY EYES BURNED from the chlorine, the sun felt warm on my wet skin, and my tongue came alive from the sour Jolly Ranchers I'd just popped into my mouth. Nothing's better than summer vacation. I was twelve years old, and Mimi, a friend of mine since we were babies, was visiting from Utah. We were walking slowly from the corner market back to the swimming pool.

"It just sucks to not know why my parents got divorced, you know? They won't tell me, and I hate it."

She was oddly quiet.

"Mimi, do you know why my parents got divorced?"

"No."

We walked on in silence, kicking gravel out from between our toes. She stopped suddenly and turned to me with tears in her eyes.

"Emily, you're one of my best friends, and I lied to you. I'm sorry. I *do* know why your parents got divorced."

My stomach lurched. I looked at her expectantly, and suddenly I knew. I don't know how I knew, I just knew. Like I knew that it was summer, or that I had blond hair, or that Mimi's tongue was green from the candy she was sucking on. It was just there, dropped out of the blue, right in front of my face.

"Is it because my dad's gay?"

I'd never even formulated that thought in my own mind, let alone spoken it out loud, but there it was.

"Yes."

My heart pounded. *How did I know that?* I searched my



Steven is gay?

Of course he is!

How on earth did I think

*I could escape having to
deal with this again?*

brain. I'm certain that no one had ever told me. And, I realized with a start, not only did I know then, but somehow I had always known. It was like very old information I'd just forgotten about.

Things began falling into place. My dad was gay. That's why my parents got divorced. My poor mom. No wonder she was so sad all the time. Well, that explained why he had guy friends with him so often. Wait a minute. That meant they were his . . . boyfriends. Gross. Did he kiss them? Even grosser! I remembered the parade. *We're here, we're queer . . .* Queer must mean gay. Oh! That must be why my mom got so mad whenever I called someone a fag. Oh my gosh, I called my dad a fag while we were wrestling a couple of weeks before. My friends and I said "You big fag!" and "That's totally gay!" all the time. My friends—what would they think? It wasn't exactly cool to be gay, even in California. Mimi was still

speaking to me, but we'd been friends all of our lives. Would the friends I'd only known for a while freak out? I didn't want anyone to find out. Ever.

I felt bad that I was ashamed to have a gay father. I mean, he was still my dad. Still my best friend. Most of my friends would probably be okay with it when they found out someday. But what about Heavenly Father? My heart sank.

Heavenly Father must be really, really angry.

NINE TIMES OUT of ten, the things I was taught at church were good and uplifting, such as when we studied how to be more like our Savior and serve one another. But once in a while, I'd hear a fire and brimstone, Sodom and Gomorrah lesson that reminded me in no uncertain terms that homosexuality was an abomination, that homosexuals were indeed better off dead at the bottom of the ocean, and would, in fact, be burned along with my non-Mormon friends at the last days. I spent hours in tears thinking of how my sinful father would be in a lesser kingdom, separated from me, for eternity.

Trying to juggle my different lives was bizarre. I hung out with my dad and half-naked Castro Street drag queens on Saturday, and with my mom and the correctly clothed, righteous descendants of Mormon pioneers on Sunday. Early morning seminary, baptisms for the dead, and Girls Camp were celebrated right along with Gay Pride parades and festivals. I tried with everything in me to reconcile my two worlds—two worlds that are irreconcilable.

The Mormon Church, which was the same thing as my Heavenly Father, apparently hated my dad. My dad, in turn, hated the Church, and thus my Heavenly Father. I loved *both*

of my fathers desperately. But I feared doing so would cause either, or both, of them to reject and stop loving me.

I couldn't please, or be loved by, both fathers. It simply wasn't possible. I had to choose. So, of course, I chose my dad. He was immediate, tangible, and bigger and louder to me than anything. Even though it broke me in half, I chose him over everything—God, the Church, my mom. Even myself.

IN MARCH 1984, my parents sat us down and told us that my dad had AIDS. On 19 July of that same year, he died in our home. I was shattered. There was no life for me without my dad, and I fell into a deep depression, begging God every day to let me die, too. I tried to repent. I asked Heavenly Father's forgiveness for not choosing him instead of my dad. I promised that I would never disobey him or put anyone or anything ahead of him again. Righteously determined to do whatever it took to earn back God's love, which I was certain I had lost, I surrendered my life completely back to the Church. Whenever questions arose about something that was taught or said, or something that I didn't agree with, I just focused on my new mantra. "Don't think about it; don't think about it; don't think about it. . . ."

In 1986, my mother's book *Goodbye, I Love You* (titled after the last words I said to my dad) was published, and once again, we were in the spotlight. At first I was frightened about what others would think and say about my having had a gay dad. And I felt protective of his memory. I didn't want him to be just another "fag who died of AIDS." But my mother handled it beautifully, and we received little to no negative feedback from anyone. Having a book to read about my father—and about my parents when they were meeting, courting, and newly married—was a gift. In many ways, my mom had given me a piece of him back again.

SEVEREN YEARS LATER, I met Steven Fales. I had been through a series of painfully unhealthy relationships, had just lost the love of my life to cancer, was depressed out of my mind, and more desperate than ever to make sense of things by being obsessively faithful and obedient.

People ask me if I knew that Steven was gay before we got married. I cannot tell you how much I wish I could say no. We had been dating seriously for several months. Besides my having received the necessary spiritual confirmations that he was the one I was to marry, priesthood blessings and leaders flat out told me that Steven had been provided for me.

One warm summer night we got some ice cream, and he said that he wanted us to go somewhere we could talk. It was a beautiful night. I felt peaceful, content, and even a bit excited about the future Steven and I would build. My happiness lasted for all of about thirty seconds. Long enough for Steven to open his mouth.

"Emily, I really want us to talk about some things. Um, okay, . . . things have been going really well with us, and we have talked a lot about our future, but before we go any further, we . . . um . . . we need to talk about some past experiences I've had with . . . uh . . . homosexuality."

I started silently screaming in my head. "Are you freakin' kidding me? Steven is gay? Of course he is! How on earth did I think I could escape having to deal with this again?" All I wanted to do was to run away as fast as I possibly could.

It was pretty much the same story my dad and so many of our friends had told: questions before mission, brief experience after. Then he freaked out, confessed to his bishop, got into therapy, and was now a healed and fervent believer in reparative therapy, which was actually something I had never heard of. He explained to me that male homosexuality was the result of having an overbearing mother and a weak or emotionally absent father, and that once those issues were fully addressed and worked through, the so-called homosexual in question found himself transformed into a full-blown heterosexual.

I listened quietly and felt myself shivering even though the night was still warm. How could I possibly marry him, even if it was what God commanded? I honestly didn't think I could. Steven was very emotional. I just felt cold and tired, and I told him I needed some time.

I was furious with God. I didn't understand why he would require the unthinkable of me. He wanted me to marry a *gay man*? I wasn't stupid. I knew exactly how it would turn out if we got married. I'd been on *Geraldo*; I'd been to the Gay Day parades and festivals. *They're here, they're queer*—I was used to it! Homosexuality couldn't be healed! Or could it?

What if it could be? No. Come on, I knew better than that. I prayed: "Heavenly Father. Do I have to do this?" The answer was instantaneous. "No, you don't have to do this. But if you do, it will heal the deepest, darkest parts of yourself."

I did want that. I had always wanted that. To be healed from life's fractures was something that my soul had yearned for in those same deep dark places that would apparently be healed if I married a gay man. So, if it would ultimately be healing for me to marry Steven, that must mean that homosexuality could be healed. Steven believed that reparative therapy worked. And he believed that with my love, support, and understanding of the complexities of it all, he could absolutely do it. No question.

Maybe God's plan was far bigger than our just getting married. Maybe together we had a "greater-than-us" work to do. Maybe we could marry and actually be successful at it. We could write a book together—a far different book than the one my mother wrote. Our book would show how we conquered successfully what the previous generation had failed miserably to do. Steven and I would be the poster children for reparative therapy.

According to the books on reparative therapy and what we were taught in church, Steven wasn't really gay at all. He was just experiencing some gender confusion and extreme opposition from Satan. And I did believe that with God, all things are possible. It all began to make perfect sense to me. I decided it had been part of The Plan, part of my life's mission, from the very beginning. We were being swept into the middle of something far bigger than either one of us, something beyond our control, and something from which there was no turning back.

On 15 December 1993, Steven and I entered the Salt Lake Temple to be married as husband and wife for time and all eternity. Outwardly I was the beaming and gracious bride. Inwardly, I was melting. As we sat waiting to be led into the sealing room, I excused myself to go to the bathroom several times where all I could do was stare wide-eyed at myself in the mirror. The weight of what Steven and I were undertaking suddenly felt unbearably heavy. It was my job to keep him straight for the rest of our lives. The thought made me want to take a very long nap.

An old college friend of my father's, also dealing with homosexuality, had gone with his fiancée to Salt Lake to speak to a general authority, who looked the fiancée in the eyes and said, "If you are sufficiently feminine, you can save this man." At least I knew better than that. I knew it wasn't a matter of my being woman enough to do it. I knew that our success would have nothing to do with my femininity. It would have everything to do with my faith. *Our* faith. This was our Abrahamic sacrifice. I wondered if God might send an angel to save us at the last minute, too.

When it was time, we walked hand in hand into the sealing room, which was filled with dozens of our closest family and friends. We requested that the same General Authority who had sealed my parents be the one to seal us—as far as I know, we could have been in the same room, too.

I don't remember a single word that was spoken during the ceremony. But I did finally relax and feel peaceful. Well, more sleepy than peaceful, but it did the trick. As we approached the altar, everyone watched us kneel down across from one another, take hands and smile. Had those there, including myself, the power to see into the future, we would have seen my soul leave my body, float above the altar, and then lie across it like a sacrificial lamb. We both said, "Yes." The knife plunged. It was done. We were married.

Our wedding day was beautiful. My dress was beautiful. The pictures were beautiful. The reception and string quartet were beautiful. The song that Steven surprised me with was beautiful. We left in a horse-drawn carriage that took us to the perfect inn, where we would spend our perfect wedding night. We had everyone, including ourselves, beautifully and perfectly fooled.

With the romance and drama of the wedding over, it was time to be married. Only, neither one of us knew how. I don't mean that other couples get the manual containing all the secrets to marital bliss and we just happened to miss out. But I was raised by a single mom, and Steven's parents' marriage was less than exemplary. We were both clueless, had enormous baggage, and, until we were actually in it, didn't believe everyone who had told us how hard marriage was. But it was hard. It was terribly hard.

I thought that I had married a friend, someone to hang out with, laugh, hold hands, cuddle, play, and do life with. Steven thought he had married a successful, beautiful woman who would act, have a career, help open professional doors for him, and, most important, turn him into a raging heterosexual. We both failed each other miserably.

Within a matter of months, Steven and I went from being as in love as we were capable of being, to being friendly, to being cordial, to being sad, to being angry, to being alone and resigned to the pain and disillusionment of it all. We became highly skilled at the passive aggressive dance we allowed our marriage to become. On rare occasions, we fought, but mainly we just let things stew in silence and I did my very best to ignore the elephant in our house whose name we did not speak and whose presence we would not acknowledge.

The only really honest way to describe our six-and-a-half-year marriage is simply to say it was horrible. For both of us. At some point, the elephant began sitting directly on Steven's chest, and it got harder and harder for him to breathe. He needed therapy, and our bishop agreed to pay for it. Steven started phone therapy with Joseph Nicolosi, the guru of reparative therapy himself, the man who wrote "the" book on the subject and founded NARTH—the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. Steven decided to be proactive in his pursuit of total and complete heterosexuality, and he desperately wanted me to be there right alongside him fighting the fight. But I just couldn't. Too many years of resentment and anger had created a Grand Canyon-sized emotional gulf between us. I'd been numb when it came to Steven for years. And when it came to the issue of reparative therapy, I instantly shut down every time it was mentioned. I had to believe in it because it was the only hope for our two children to have an intact family and because my faith told me to believe. But I was unable to look too closely at it. I was terrified I would discover that the emperor really wasn't wearing any clothes after all.

When, in the spring of 2000, Steven finally came clean with me about his extensive infidelity, I was dumbfounded. I always thought, in the back of my mind, that if he ever "acted out," it would be a spur-of-the-moment, oops-sorry-honey-I-couldn't-help-it-I-fell-in-love-with-him kind of thing. It had never once entered my mind that he would take the initiative and go out cruising, let alone allow it to get as out of control as it had gotten. I knew the marriage was over, and Steven knew that I knew it. We had attempted the impossible and had failed.

There were times he begged me, "Emily, we have kids. I know I can do this. I know I can!" The problem was that in the same conversation, he had said, "Em, sometimes I think I could really see myself maybe becoming a gay activist." Steven was too terrified to admit it, but that was what he really wanted, and I knew it better than he did.

I was heartbroken for my children and what they would have to go through. I had been adamant for so long that I would never put them through a divorce—that I would die for them. And it's true, I would. But what good is a dead mother? I was finally clear that what both my children and I needed was for me, and their father, to be alive. Steven and I had never figured out how to do that—to be married to each other and be alive at the same time.

SO MUCH HAS happened in the nearly six years since our divorce. Steven moved to New York, and anyone who has seen his one-man show, *Confessions of a*

Mormon Boy, knows the course his life has taken. When I saw his show in Utah, on stage for the first time, I felt like I was being dismembered with an ice pick. If I had been a random audience member with no ulcerated, emotionally wounded connection to every single person and event portrayed, I might have appreciated, if not almost enjoyed, the show. But I wasn't "random audience girl," and I certainly wasn't emotionally disconnected.

The next year, and what felt like several lifetimes later, I saw the show again in San Francisco with my mother, who had chosen not to see it before then, and I had a somewhat different reaction. I was no longer bleeding as I had been from the wounds caused by our marriage and divorce. My heart was healing, and I was strengthened by something brand new coursing through my veins. For years, people had told me that I needed to write a book. My desire to have my life remain private had kept me from ever taking the suggestion seriously. With the burgeoning success of Steven's play, my desire for privacy had obviously been blown clear out of the water. And just that afternoon, I had read something that changed everything for me.

I had picked up the *San Francisco Examiner* and read its review of *Confessions*. Halfway through the article were the words, "As important as his relationship with his wife is to his story—and as much as his desire to respect her privacy may be commendable—it's disconcerting how completely she disappears from his 'Confessions' between courtship and divorce."

I was floored. That reviewer had, in one sentence, summed up my entire marriage. I had completely disappeared between our courtship and divorce. Just as my mother, and every other straight woman I knew who had married a gay man, had completely disappeared between courtship and divorce. I read the sentence again. And again. I heard my voice reciting the words over and over in my head, louder and louder, until all I could hear was a scream that swallowed me whole. It was primal, and it was insistent: "*It is time!*"

I went home that evening and could hardly write fast enough. I grabbed an old notebook and began writing a book that, more than three years later, is finally nearing completion. Sometimes I've sat at my computer for hours completely unable to make my fingers stop moving. Other times, I've had to walk away for months at a time before facing it all again.



*If one of these wonderful
young men that you so
fervently believe can
change came knocking
on your door wanting
to marry your daughter,
would you let him?*

Writing my story has been one of the most gut-wrenching, exhilarating, and cathartic experiences of my life. Sitting day after day, month after month, reliving story of my life after story of my life, over and over and over again, has given me a perspective on many things I would never have gained otherwise.

Marrying Steven *did* heal deep dark places in me. I wish I would have chosen an easier way to deal with the massive unfinished business I had with my dad and to finally learn that my personal strength and happiness aren't dependent upon another person. With Steven, just as when I was with my dad, I had erased myself. But I chose to do it the hard way. And because of that, I *have* learned to look to myself first, to listen to myself first. I now know firsthand what happens when I don't.

And while I no longer believe that every spiritual experience should be taken at face value, or that every word spoken in every priesthood blessing comes directly from God, if Steven and I had never married, we never would have had the children we had—and a world without them is not a place in which I can imagine living. Bottom line: if I hadn't married Steven, I wouldn't be where I am today. I wouldn't be who I am today. And I really like that person. A lot.

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK my opinion about what causes homosexuality. Is it genetic? Is it a choice?

Is it caused by sexual abuse? Is it a sexual addiction? Is it really caused by an overbearing mother and an absent father?

We want so badly to put people, including ourselves, in perfectly labeled boxes, but it just doesn't work that way. There are gay people, and there are straight people. And under the headings of "gay" and "straight" are about a million variations of human beings. Regardless of our sexual orientation, each of us was greatly influenced by family, friends, religion, school, teachers, neighborhoods, cities, states, and individual life experiences. All of these things influenced who we are sexually—our comfort zones, our hang-ups, our appetites, our desires. Everyone has her or his unique recipe that makes them who they are. It's rooted in biology and branches off in a billion directions from there.

To me, the issue is not what makes someone straight or what makes someone gay. The right question to ask is why people are not accepted for simply being who they are. Saying that someone shouldn't be gay is like saying grass shouldn't be

green. Saying it shouldn't be so doesn't change the fact that it is. It's time to accept that gay is gay and straight is straight, and move on.

Homosexuality cannot be fixed, nor do I believe it should be. The poster children in the reparative therapy movement will swear on their lives that they have been "healed." It's easy to swear by something that gives you wealth and notoriety and very difficult to walk away from hero status and lose your livelihood. It still doesn't mean that anything has changed on a deep and fundamental level.

Steven worked hard at becoming straight. It didn't work. My father worked hard at becoming straight. It didn't work. Decades ago, a surprising number of men underwent electric shock therapy at BYU to become straight. It didn't work. Handfuls of my friends have worked hard at becoming straight. It hasn't worked. As one man put it, "Reparative therapy doesn't work. We all know it doesn't work. We just say that it does to keep everybody off our backs."

I know a few couples in which the husband is gay who have chosen to stay married and are actually experiencing a successful relationship. In my experience, this seems far easier to accomplish if the man has been "out" and has immersed himself in and become disillusioned with the gay lifestyle. He is free from all the wondering, the mystery, and the "what ifs?" Certainly, once a couple has married, they have every right to make whatever choices they want for their family. If they mutually want to keep their family together by putting both of their sexual selves' aside and by being faithful and respectful partners, then they should do so. But it is my very strong

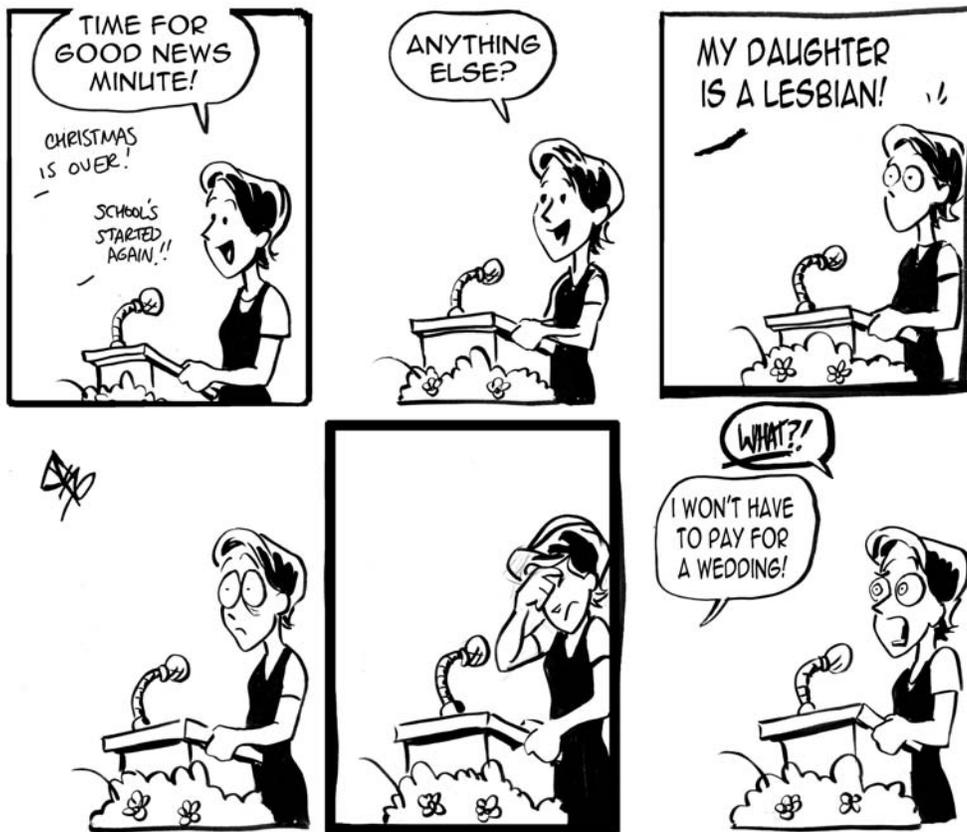
opinion that no woman should ever have to be married to a gay man. And no gay man should ever have to be married to a woman. I know that some couples, for several reasons, have chosen such a union. But the difference is that they have chosen it for *their* own reasons. Not for someone else's. And if they have found real happiness and true personal fulfillment together, they are the rare exception.

I would ask anyone the same question my mother asked her former bishop when he knocked on her door several years ago asking her to sign a petition supporting Proposition 22 against gay marriage, which the Church in California was campaigning for. "If one of these wonderful young men that you so fervently believe can change came knocking on your door wanting to marry your daughter, would you let him?"

My dad had many dreams about changing the perceptions people have of homosexuals. And not just the perceptions that straight people have. He also wanted to dramatically alter the view gay people have of themselves. "Things will be different one day, Em, you'll see," he told me over and over. He was right. They are changing. In the early eighties, we never would have seen a show like *Will and Grace* or *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. And, even though one can argue over whether these shows break down or reinforce stereotypes, I think they have been phenomenal steps in the right direction. I recently saw *Brokeback Mountain* with my friends Scott and Walter. What a profound experience that was for me to sit in a movie theater in Sandy, Utah, with a gay couple whom I adore, watching a film my father could only have dreamed of seeing.

My wish is that the day will come when homosexuals will grow up free of shame, without once questioning that they have the same option that heterosexuals take for granted now, which is to one day fall in love with the man or woman of their choice and get to build a life of love, passion, dignity, and personal fulfillment together. My wish is that gay children (and children with gay parents) will never again have to grow up hearing Primary, Sunday School, and seminary lessons about how their only hope for salvation is to kill who they are inside, that who they are is an abomination before God and that they'd be better off dead than gay. And my wish is that the day will come when society and religions will stop colluding to create marriages (and families) that are either doomed to fail from the beginning or continue to create enormous, unnecessary pain for everyone involved.

I hope we'll get there. I believe we can. It is time. For all of us. ☹



JEANNETTE ATWOOD