

Witness to Reconciliation

Sam and Jean Martin

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We would like to share our experience with the sexual orientation of our daughter, Sarah. We had some parallels in our difficult struggle with this but our journey also had some differences, so we will offer some comments separately.

Sam Martin

I was aware of Sarah's struggle with her sexuality as she matured through college and her early working career. I knew about relationships with men and at first suspected, and subsequently confirmed, relationships with women. I thought I was okay with same-sex relationships but when Sarah announced that her partner had moved in to live and then their plans to marry, I quickly realized that any acceptance I had for same-sex relationships was at best for someone else's child, not mine. I had a problem and the problem was the relationship, not the person of her partner, whom I had known and respected for several years. I was frank and open with both of them about my struggle and I asked them for time – time to think, pray, talk and to try to understand. They continued to visit from Portland on holidays and in the summer, in fact they insisted on coming together or not at all, and, in retrospect, they were right. Seeing them together as a couple, a team, how they cared for each other and how happy Sarah was, helped me to not just accept the relationship but to value it.

I still have a ways to go but last March I proudly walked Sarah down the aisle at their commitment ceremony. Oregon has subsequently legalized same-sex marriage and the discussion is happening all across the nation and soon in the Supreme Court. But we know from the Civil Rights movement that removing legal barriers and creating a new reality are two different things. I truly appreciate the role of Hope Church toward a "Room for All" that is offered to me and to our community as I continue my journey to full reconciliation and understanding.

Jean Martin

My story of this reconciliation is a journey of awareness, acknowledgement, acceptance, and affirmation.

Awareness:

This journey began for me at our daughter Sarah's college graduation 2002 when she said to me "Mom, I don't know if I like boys, girls, or both". I replied with something like "what makes you think that?", but don't recall much further conversation at the time. Over the next several years there were other conversations and it was evident that Sarah was figuring out who and what she was. However, since she lives 2000 miles away it was not something that we faced every day.

Acknowledgement:

Several years later we were attending a wedding in Chicago and Sarah was there with her girlfriend Jess. During this weekend it was very evident they were a couple who cared deeply about each other. And I was uncomfortable. Acknowledging the relationship was difficult, but truly accepting it was going to be much more challenging.

Acceptance:

That Thanksgiving Sarah asked if Jess could come home with her for Thanksgiving. I flinched and said I didn't know - I'd have to think about it. Sarah made it clear that if Jess was not welcome she would not be coming either. After that phone call I realized I needed to accept Sarah and her relationship with Jess or lose the close bond I had always had with my daughter. There was so much to be lost and nothing to be gained by not accepting their relationship. I couldn't get my head around it but knew that most of all I loved my daughter and wanted her to be happy. I needed time.

The following spring Sarah ran the Paris marathon. Jess accompanied her, and Sam and I traveled to France to watch. The day we were leaving Sarah and Jess told us they were getting married. I was literally and figuratively speechless. I was afraid if I spoke I would either cry or be sick.

I kept thinking why, if I have no problem accepting same sex relationships or marriages with friends, colleagues, students, friend's children..., why is it so difficult to accept with my own daughter? Sarah was open about her sexual orientation, but other than lengthy dinner conversations with Sam, I didn't talk about it much, and I struggled with it.

The next month I went to Spain with three women friends to hike the last hundred miles of the Camino de Santiago. During those seven days as we walked and talked about all aspects of life, I shared with them that Sarah was in a serious relationship with a woman, and that they were planning to get married. The warmth and support I felt from them was amazing - reassuring and affirming. A few months later I spent a long weekend with college friends and the same thing happened. I found that each time I talked about it it became easier, and more often than not others shared their stories of experiences reconciling LGBT situations within their own families.

Affirmation:

Last March families - parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephew, as well as close friends joined Sarah and Jess in Portland, OR to celebrate their union. At that time I was finally able to honestly and sincerely say to Sarah that while she had taken us on a journey we didn't anticipate, in the end she had shown us that being true to herself was what mattered. I told her that as we celebrated her union with Jess I wanted her to know how much I loved, cherished, and respected her for the remarkable young woman she had become.

We spent this past New Years with Sarah and Jess in their new home. It was wonderful to be able to truly celebrate the new year with them knowing that I had been able to reconcile my own feelings, and could now fully embrace and affirm their union.