A Mormon father relates how confronting his son's homosexuality has realigned much of his theology and sense of morality.

MUGGED BY REALITY

By Gary M. Watts

MY SENTINEL EXPERIENCE WITH HOMOSEXUALITY occurred in early December 1989, when our then twenty-three-year-old son, Craig, found the courage to confide in my wife and me that he was homosexual. I vividly remember that night. I was caught by complete surprise. At times, it seems like just yesterday; other times, it seems like an eternity ago when, through tears, Craig said, "I've been trying for several years to get rid of these feelings without success. I feel like I have cancer or cerebral palsy or some incurable disease."

So began our incredible journey. Here we are, eight years later, sharing our experience, still trying to understand. Our strong faith in the inherent goodness of our son is a common thread that has kept us going, motivated our study, and helped us persevere. The reality of Craig's life and his integrity in dealing openly and honestly with his same-sex attraction has altered our world-view and opened vistas of thought and action that would have been otherwise impossible. I hope these thoughts will be educational. As a prelude, I share excerpts from a letter Craig wrote to his sister Becky in 1992:

When you called me on Christmas Eve, I had a chance to talk to Dad alone for a few minutes. He asked whether I wanted him to tell you that I'm gay. My only option at that point would have been to have told you myself amidst all that holiday cheer. I just didn't feel like pouring out my soul, recounting my own horror, disgust, and agony—I have done enough of that, and it isn't doing anyone a favor. The truth is there are and have always been people like me. From my point of view (which may differ greatly from yours—which is part of the reason I hesitated to tell you), the problem is not in me (I certainly didn't choose this) but in a culture that refuses to get information or look at hard facts that exist in the world.

It all started a long time ago. I always felt different from everyone else. I had a string of crushes, mostly on teachers throughout high school. When friends started making out, I couldn't understand what they were doing or why. The bewilderment soon gave way to anxiety because being different is dangerous in high school, and I didn't want to be different. But I didn't want to kiss girls, either. I forced myself to kiss my date after the Junior Prom to see if some magical transformation might occur—nothing. Anxiety built again until I gave it another try, bumping teeth (a very awkward attempt at a kiss) with my date after the Senior Dinner Dance.

At about the time I graduated, Dr. Ruth [Westheimer] (of all people) ushered me into the realm of knowing. A [radio] caller asked what it meant that his man friend had sexual fantasies that involved only other men. Dr. Ruth wisely suggested, "Perhaps your friend is gay." An electric shock went through my body, and I knew perfectly that I was gay. The problem was that the only gay people I had seen were reprobate losers with greasy hair, no shirts, marching around San Francisco obnoxiously. I was not one of them.

But I was. I am. There are lots of us, all kinds of us. We're everywhere—even in sleepy old Provo. I didn't know anyone else who was gay, and I would die before telling anyone. I still thought of it as wrong, as a disease I needed to be cured of. I went on a mission, in part to try to get over it without telling a soul.

A year after my mission, I told Mom and Dad, went to psychiatrists, worried. Slowly I told friends and collected my self-esteem. Now I don't cry anymore when I tell people. I don't think of it as the worst thing in the world I could possibly tell someone about myself. I think of it as just one more of the quirks in life that we never seem to finish running up against. . . . I think it's a shame that sexuality is so hushed up in Mormon culture. I went through a lot of misery that could have been avoided. I worry about the others like me who

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The lives of our gay children have “mugged” us, as parents, into a complete overhaul of our own world-views, our understanding of good and evil.

The title of this talk is not original; I decided upon it before I wrote this talk. I was reading an article written during the 1996 Republican primaries about Pat Buchanan’s sister, Bay, who was his campaign manager. She is Mormon and has been described as a feminist. Apparently, she married a Mormon attorney, converted, and has subsequently divorced, but she has maintained her membership and loyalty to the Church. She is, according to this article, a single mother with primary custody of her two children. Commenting on the apparent incongruity of her Mormonism and feminism, the author simply explained Bay’s feminism because “a feminist is a woman who, more or less, has been mugged by reality.”

As Mormon parents of gay children, we, too, have been “mugged” by the reality of the lives of our gay children and their attempts to reconcile their same-sex attractions with broad-based Church and societal disapproval. We are viewed by many of our fellow Church members as peculiar, as something other than mainstream, as something less than the “whole package,” as people to be wary of, people whose opinions are suspect, people to commiserate with, people whose parenting skills are questionable, people to be treated a little differently than others. We are recognized by most others for what they perceive we are: accidental activists who are doing our best as supportive parents playing a role in which they hope and pray, and fully expect, they themselves will never be cast.

When our daughter, Lori, saw the title of my talk, she immediately interpreted it negatively, assuming from the word “mugged” that, for a parent, having gay children must be similar to “taking a beating.” Instead, I’m talking about how the reality of the lives of our gay children has “mugged” us, as parents, into a complete overhaul of our own world-views, our understanding of good and evil, our views about “following the Brethren,” and even our political party affiliations.

What follows is a description of how our views have changed. I will speak frankly about issues that are deeply meaningful to me. These ideas are mine; they are not necessarily espoused or even supported by Family Fellowship, with which I am associated. Family Fellowship does not take an advocacy position on any issue and has, from its inception, tried to promote only love and understanding and respect for all decisions made by those dealing with homosexuality in their families.

A THREAT TO FAMILY AND SOCIETY?
Is same-sex attraction morally neutral?

Here is what I currently believe about homosexuality:

1. It occurs in a small, finite percentage of human beings and other mammalian species. It has always been present and will continue to be so.
2. Its causes are poorly understood.
3. It is rarely chosen by those affected by it.
4. It is not amenable to significant change. (By “it,” I mean the same-sex attraction, the core longings, and not behavior, which is clearly alterable.)
5. It is morally neutral.

Most thoughtful people I know share my belief about the first four items, but disagree with the fifth. As long as there is a generalized, ongoing disagreement over the moral neutrality of homosexuality, the discrimination and disenfranchisement of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals will continue. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of people are beginning to realize that gay people can, indeed, be moral in their relationships, but the great majority of people who recognize this are hesitant to speak up because they do not want to appear to be at odds with the prevailing moral order. Timur
Kuran explores this phenomenon at some length in his recent book, *Private Truths, Public Lies.* To maintain acceptance and respect, individuals feel a need to demonstrate that they accept society's basic institutions and share its fundamental objectives and perceptions. We saw this phenomenon in the recent lopsided passage by the U.S. Congress of the so-called Defense of Marriage Act. Doubtless, few politicians were willing to vote their private preferences, recognizing that a "no" vote might cost them politically.

I've gradually concluded that to promote greater understanding of gays and lesbians, our efforts must center on making mainstream the reality that, just like heterosexuals, gays and lesbians are capable of moral relationships. I am continually amazed at how much common ground there is with my conservative friends when we discuss homosexuality. Most truly do agree with the first four beliefs. The problems they see largely stem from their belief that homosexual behavior is, de novo, immoral.

My business partner, Rod Petersen, who is a doctor and an LDS bishop, is a man with great compassion and respect for others and for his church. He recently told me, "I've gradually formed my own impression. I'm satisfied that homosexuality is largely biologic, is not often chosen, and is not changeable. I'm still uncertain about its expression." I had a long telephone conversation with Howard Stephenson, the Utah State Republican senator from Draper, who was one of the most outspoken legislators during a recent Utah legislative brouhaha about homosexuality. He basically shares Rod Petersen's sentiment, but because of his difficulty with the fifth item, he believes that public policy should continue to discourage homosexual behavior. Why? Because most people are uncomfortable with homosexuality. They have been taught that it is wrong. They recognize the difficulties of being gay in our society and church and sincerely want to discourage it as a choice. But they don't understand the complexities of being homosexual. They intuitively think that all gay people will be happier by repressing their attractions and living as heterosexuals. They believe that sanctioning same-sex relationships will undermine the moral fabric of our society and adversely affect the nuclear family. They simply do not understand that homosexuals are not a threat to the family, that the real threat is people's profound ignorance about homosexuality and their reluctance to face the truth about it.

RE-EVALUATING OUR PARADIGMS
"No matter who says what, don't believe it if it don't make no sense."

WELL, how do we go about helping people become comfortable about homosexuality? Liberating people from their discomfort with homosexuality, their automatic tendency to think of homosexuals in terms of perverse sex, and their often bizarre notion of who gay people are, what gay people value, and how gay people live is a huge, daunting task. A recent comment made to the recent New Republic editor Andrew Sullivan, who is openly gay, by conservative commentator Pat Buchanan in a debate epitomizes how many feel: "Andrew, it's not who you are. It is what you do!"

We must begin, first, with ourselves. Most of us, as parents, have similar difficulty with item five. Let me share a little subtlety that demonstrates how most of us feel and why I think we have to be willing to constantly rethink our positions. We all have a tendency to cling to and promote the idea that choice is not operative in the lives of our children. We all want to emphasize that our children did not choose to be homosexual—that in some way they are victims of biology. Recently, Family Fellowship invited Dr. Roger Gorski to our parent conference because we all know intuitively that something biological in our gay children contributes to or has resulted in their same-sex attractions. We are anxious for the scientific community to corroborate these feelings. Why? Are we guilty of the same thing I challenged Utah State Representative David Bresnahan about earlier this year? Trying to find an excuse for our children's or our sibling's homosexuality? To a degree, we are. Why? Because we can't quite feel comfortable with the idea that same-sex relationships have the capacity for morality whether or not they are chosen.

I used to get incensed when some in the gay community claimed they had chosen to be homosexual. I simply did not believe them and saw their statements as being counter-productive. I now recognize why some make such claims. They understand that same-sex relationships are, indeed, morally neutral and that they need not apologize for them, whether they were chosen or not; that claiming they simply had no choice reinforced society's deep aversions, and perhaps our own, to homosexuality, and left those aversions in place. They don't want tolerance because they are victims; they see themselves, rightly, as rational, moral individuals with a right to love whomever they will. They have made it through the morass of anti-gay rhetoric, tradition, and perception and have arrived, appropriately, at the position that the morality of relationships is based on the way those relationships are conducted, not on who is involved in them.

Who could be critical of a relationship that can provoke the kind of elation that is obvious in this line in a recent letter we received from a gay friend who has just begun a committed relationship: "I am so happy that I can't even explain it in words. And to think that only a couple of years ago I was thinking that I had nothing to live for. I'm so happy to have friends like you guys and that I can share this type of news with you." I find it sad that this type of news has to be shared so discreetly and that our friend is unable to share the joy of his relationship with his own mother and father. When some try to tell me that gay people can't have a moral relationship, I often think of an old cowboy adage: "No matter who says what, don't believe it if it don't make no sense."

When discussing homosexuality, I ask friends and colleagues if they think it is possible for a gay person to have a moral relationship in this lifetime. Almost everyone hesitates, because, intuitively, it just doesn't make sense to say no. Americans, along with most other people I know, put a high value on being fair. While most have incorporated into their belief system the per-
ception that homosexuality is wrong, they generally haven't given much thought as to what that means to someone who is gay. It means that any gay or lesbian must deny himself or herself any moral, loving, affirming relationship with someone attractive. By imagining such celibate conditions upon themselves, heterosexuals can understand just how enormous is the request for homosexual celibacy.

National gay author Bruce Bawer has compared the building of acceptance of homosexuals to teaching a language:

When gays speak about themselves, they are speaking one language; when most straight people speak about gays, they are speaking another. Most heterosexuals look at gay lives the way I look at a page of German, I may be able to pick out a few familiar words, but I feel awkward when I use them, and if I try to put together a sentence, I'm likely to find myself saying something offensive or hurtful. There's only one way to get past that feeling of confusion: tireless, meticulous dedication to study. You can't learn a foreign language overnight, and you can't teach it by screaming it at people. You teach it word by word, until bit by bit, they feel comfortable speaking it and can find their way around the country where it's spoken.

Consider this beautiful essay by Bishop Mel Wheatley Jr. of the United Methodist Church, entitled "I Do Not Believe Homosexuality a Sin."

I am an enthusiastically heterosexual male. Is my heterosexuality a virtue? A sign of righteousness? Either an accomplishment or a victory of some kind on my part? Of course not. I had nothing whatsoever to do with my being heterosexual. It is a mysterious gift of God's grace communicated through an exceedingly complex set of chemical, biological, chromosomal, hormonal, environmental, developmental factors totally outside my control. My heterosexuality is a gift—neither a virtue nor a sin.

What I do with my heterosexuality, however, is my personal, moral, and spiritual responsibility. My behavior as a heterosexual may be, therefore, very sinful—brutal, exploitative, selfish, promiscuous, superficial. My behavior as a heterosexual, on the other hand, may be beautiful—tender, considerate, loyal, other-centered, profound.

Precisely this distinction between being a heterosexual and behaving as a heterosexual applies to homosexual persons as well, unless you and I are guilty of that lowest blow of all, and that is to work by double standards.

Homosexuality, quite like heterosexuality, is neither a virtue nor an accomplishment. It is a mysterious gift of God's grace communicated through an exceedingly complex set of chemical, biological, chromosomal, hormonal, environmental, developmental factors totally outside my homosexual friends' control. His or her homosexuality is a gift—neither a virtue nor a sin. What she or he does with their homosexuality, however, is their personal, moral, and spiritual responsibility.

Their behavior as a homosexual may, therefore, be very sinful—brutal, exploitative, selfish, promiscuous, superficial. Their behavior as a homosexual, on the other hand, may be beautiful—tender, considerate, loyal, other-centered, profound.

With this interpretation of the mystery that must be attributed to sexual orientation, both heterosexual and homosexual, I clearly do not believe that homosexuality is a sin.

I find his conclusions interesting and wonder what it is about this particular minister that has enabled him to overcome tradition, prophetic utterances, and biblical references to arrive at his conclusions.

JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION
It is time to look past Moses; the greater law superseded much of the Old Testament.

NOW digress to share some relevant observations. First, consider this statement by President Gordon B. Hinckley in his interview with Mike Wallace on the CBS News magazine 60 Minutes:
MW: From 1830 to 1978, blacks could not become priests in the Mormon church. Right?

GBH: That's correct.

MW: Why?

GBH: Because the leaders of the church interpreted the doctrine that way.

MW: Church policy had it that blacks had the mark of Cain. Brigham Young said, "Cain slew his brother, and the Lord put a mark upon him, which is the flat nose and the black skin."

GBH: It's behind us. Look, that's behind us. Don't worry about those little flecks of history.

MW: Skeptics will suggest, "Well, look, if we're going to expand, we can't keep the blacks out."

GBH: Pure speculation.

Different people will make different interpretations of what President Hinckley really meant. I see his comments as a gentle rebuke to previous Church leaders in much the same way I see Jesus' "good news" as a gentle rebuke to the Old Testament prophets, especially Moses. The implication to me is clearly similar—that was then; now, we have a higher law. That's behind us, and we're not going to look back.

Moses has played a pivotal role in the Judeo-Christian belief that homosexuality is immoral. Virtually everything in scripture concerning the immorality of homosexuality has its origin in the Pentateuch, which is popularly credited to Moses' authorship. I have great difficulty understanding why his writings about homosexuality are accepted so literally by the Judeo-Christian community and our own church. Most thoughtful individuals, when reading the first five books of the Bible, discount much of what Moses records. Many Latter-day Saints no longer accept the literal interpretation of his accounts of the Creation, the Flood, the confusion of tongues, or the parting of the Red Sea. We have long since abandoned his requirement of the death penalty for those who break the Sabbath or commit adultery, incest, fornication, homosexuality, and bestiality. It was Moses who said that God opposed intermarriage, who sanctioned plural marriage, and who even pronounced the death penalty on animals involved in bestiality with humans. We have here, literally, an eye-for-an-eye kind of person, one who was strongly opinionated, dogmatic, and, yes, even vindictive; a person whom Jesus was correct in gently, but firmly, rebuking. If asked by a contemporary figure, such as Mike Wallace, about these past practices that seemed too severe, too prejudiced and inappropriate, might Jesus have replied, "Because Moses interpreted the doctrine that way? Isn't it interesting that so many of our friends, neighbors, and ecclesiastical leaders are willing to insist that because Moses said homosexuality was an abomination, it is? It is time to look past Moses. The greater law superseded much in the Old Testament.

The other morning, I awakened rather early and was thinking about the morality of homosexuality. Even though it was about 4:30 A.M., I nudged my wife, Millie, and asked; "Do you think right and wrong exist independent of God? Does he make these judgments arbitrarily, or is there something else on which he relies?" Has God really declared homosexuality immoral? If so, why? What is there inherently immoral in someone loving someone of the same sex? It seems like such a monstrous trick for God to allow such strong feelings to exist in some of our fellow human beings and then provide no sanction whatsoever for them to follow those feelings.

Einstein repeatedly said that the most important human endeavor is to strive for morality in our actions. I was thinking about the difficulty of relying on the word of God as a basis on which to make ethical judgments about appropriate and inappropriate responses to controversial moral questions. Bruce Dahlberg, a religion professor at Smith College, recently said: "Citations of God to back up either side of a debate, whether over private morality or public policy, is to imagine that religious belief is somehow privileged and need not be argued on its own merits in the marketplace. A major discouragement to open discussion and debate is the idea that to settle the question one has merely to "quote God." When we do not discuss in good faith, without prejudice and without claims to privilege for our views, that is—well, discussion in bad faith. In an almost autistic way it fails to comprehend that among the believers' opponents are those who also take the Bible seriously, believe in the same God, but precisely from such premises come to different conclusions about morals and public policy. It also ignores the reality that human knowledge of God—however devout, however respected, however Biblical—is imperfect and incomplete. It's obvious that different people arrive at different conclusions about what God has said and what he hasn't said. Mormons are admonished to simply follow the prophet and are promised that he will never lead us astray. In fact, in a recent BYU devotional, Apostle M. Russell Ballard said, "To you I have only one question: Are you going to follow the true and living prophets or not? It really isn't any more complicated than that. . . . [w]e will not lead you astray. We cannot." When I shared this quote with one of my more irreverent colleagues, he replied, "Aw, shucks, he's too hard on himself. He's simply not giving himself enough credit."

The problem is in the word "never." What conclusions may we draw from President Hinckley's response to Mike Wallace? Some will conclude that, in the matter of race, insofar as prophetic leadership is concerned, there may well have been some misinterpretation. The ministry of Christ is viewed by some as a repudiation of Moses' eye-for-an-eye philosophy. I am not implying that we should not listen to our prophets. They are wise and sincerely interested in helping us make correct decisions that will lead to the greatest happiness. Sensible? Yes. Erudite? Yes. Sincere? Yes. Infallible? Unlikely. If my own search leads me to conclude that homosexuality has the same capacity for morality as heterosexuality, and my Church leaders say otherwise, what is my responsibility? Is it permissible for me to dissent? Am I automatically an apostate? Are there others who share my view? Is there room for dialogue? Should I leave the Church? Should I stay and voice my con-
Our prophets are interested in helping us make decisions that will lead to the greatest happiness.

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The question of the morality of homosexuality is not just a Mormon challenge. Many Catholics, Jews, and Protestants deal with questions of infallibility and strict obedience. Everyone is striving to fashion a correct moral response to this dilemma. Listen to the musings of Andrew Sullivan, a gay Catholic man, about his own struggle to reconcile his homosexuality with his religion:

'The demand that homosexual attractions not be acted upon] raises the central question of any Catholic homosexual life: How intelligible is the church’s theological and moral position on the blamelessness of homosexuality and the moral depravity of homosexual acts? This question is one I wrestled with in my early 20s, as the increasing aridity of my emotional life began to conflict with the possibility of my living a moral life. The distinction made some kind of sense in theory, but in practice, the command to love oneself as a person of dignity yet hate the core longings that could make one emotionally whole demanded a sense of detachment or a sense of cynicism that seemed inimical to Christian life. To deny lust was one thing; to deny love was another. And to deny love in the context of Christian doctrine seemed particularly perverse.6

This e-mail message, which Millie and I received recently, demonstrates most poignantly the similar dilemma faced by gay Mormons.

I started coming out of the closet about a month ago. Since then, I have told my straight housemate, two of my best straight friends from Church, a couple of friends from school and, of course, the wonderful members of Affirmation. I am wondering what your thoughts (and personal experiences) are regarding coming out to one’s bishop and family. My bishop is a sterling guy—loving, caring, and very understanding. I was called to be Elder’s Quorum president the same day he was called to be bishop. I served for two years and then was called to be the ward mission leader for another year. From the three years I met with him in PEC [priesthood executive committee] meetings, and...
from his comments regarding homosexual members of our ward (who still remain anonymous, at least to me), I think he will be understanding. I also have the added advantage (if you want to call it that) of being in a position where the church really can’t do anything about my membership—I’m a 32-year-old gay Mormon virgin—that’s gotta put me in one of the smallest minorities ever! (Please, no offense whatsoever is intended toward those of you who have chosen a different path while still active in your membership; being gay and Mormon has taught me nothing if not to “judge not, lest ye be judged.”) If I get excommunicated, it will be because I have asked to be released from my Temple covenants so that I might seek a partner with cleanliness of conscience (again, no offense intended!). I’m pretty sure that this is the path I want to take. I don’t think I’m strong enough to stay in the Church and remain celibate until I die (though I guess that would depend on how long it will be before “I get called home”), and I don’t know that I would really want to, even if I thought I could.

At present, gay Mormons are faced with a veritable Sophie’s choice: Do I choose my child of Church membership or my choice: Do I choose my child of Church membership or my child of “core longings” for community. We’ve got to find a way to make room for some members of a Jewish synagogue to find a way to sanctification same-sex relations for its gay members. Emily Brazelton writes that “the most important thing about these couples is that they are two Jews committed to being part of the Jewish community. We’ve got to find a way to make room for them.”

Here are classic examples from Catholic, Mormon, and Jewish perspectives of the horrible conundrum faced by their gay members. I agree with Brazelton: we’ve got to make room for them. Making room for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals in the Church and in society requires a major paradigm shift but one I’m confident we are capable of accomplishing.

Jewish philosopher Avishai Margalit’s wonderful new book, The Decent Society, is not specifically about homosexuality, but it is about the way society and institutions should treat minorities. Margalit talks about the importance of self-respect and honor in the lives of human beings. He describes a decent society as one whose institutions do not humiliate its members. He defines humiliation as “injury to self-respect, that is, to the respect a human being deserves for the very fact of being human.” A decent society, he says, is one that fights conditions that justify its dependents’ humiliation. Margalit’s comments about encompassing others have relevance to groups such as the LDS church.

Belonging to encompassing groups, such as the church, is one way that people give their life meaning. Rejection from a legitimate encompassing group is thus liable to be a humiliating act. An encompassing group is a mediating element between the individual and the general society. Such groups are meant to support and elevate the individual, but they may turn out in practice to be oppressive and humiliating. When we evaluate the behavior of encompassing groups we can distinguish between two dimensions. One is the dimension of voice—the price an individual in the group pays for criticizing its institutions and members. The second dimension is exit—the price the individual pays for leaving the group. Encompassing groups are oppressive when both sorts of price are high.

By Margalit’s criteria, the Church’s treatment of its gay members can be described only as oppressive and humiliating—not appropriate in a decent society.

The concept of a decent society appeals to me. Too often, we fall far short. There is a plethora of natural causes in our lives for self-humiliation, including poverty and poor health we do not need humiliation from each other. I want very much to be a member of a decent society. It seems self-evident that the Church should be the most decent of all societies. Its treatment of gay and lesbian members, however, leaves much to be desired. At the first conference we attended on homosexuality and Mormonism, in 1993, there was a panel discussion about relationships between the Church and its gay members. Responding to a question about how those relationships could be improved, a young gay man speculated that “the only way those relationships can be improved is for the Church to offer an apology to its gay members for the way they have been treated.” The most unchristian thing that has happened to me in my lifetime was the excommunication of my son from the Church. Why excommunication? So the Church could announce to the world that it abhorred homosexuality and could not and would not allow such individuals to remain members. I still can’t understand how allowing gay people in committed relationships to remain members would harm the Church. In fact, present Church policy does considerably more harm.
If I conclude homosexuals can be as moral as heterosexuals, am I an apostate?

Is there room for dialogue? Should I leave or stay? Voice my conclusions or keep them to myself?

Everyone wrestles with these questions over some issue.

Membership in the Church is so important to so many gay members that they try heterosexual marriage, unwittingly dragging a spouse and any resulting children into a maelstrom. The carnage thus produced is simply incalculable.

OUT AND ABOUT

How can society ever change its perceptions if people can't see and know others who are homosexual, or their parents and friends?

People are never going to get comfortable with homosexuality until they become acquainted with homosexuals and with their parents and friends. Some, like me, must be "mugged by reality" to have their eyes opened. Every one of us is at a different stage of understanding. We all carry our own unique backpack of past experiences, and the contents of our backpacks, to a large extent, determine how we respond to our options. Those of us with gay children certainly have a different backpack than those who haven't, and the responses to the idea of same-sex attractions will differ accordingly. One of our jobs as parents is to articulate our experience to help those not similarly affected to see. To do that, we have to be out, we have to be public. People who are not dealing with homosexuality first-hand will look around and make their judgments based on what they see. They hear the figures: some claim that as many as 10 percent of the population is gay, but they see only a tiny fraction, the fraction that, too often, has come to resent their disenfranchisement from society and have developed an in-your-face attitude, which contributes to the negative perception that is already out there. How can society ever change its perceptions if people can't see and know others who are homosexual, or their parents and friends? Only then can they begin to understand that many gays and lesbians, too, are moral and that they do have and deserve a place in society.

I remember the story of the football game between the big animals and the little animals. The little animals had been thoroughly dominated by the big animals and were trailing 38-0 at half-time. The big animals began the second half from their own twenty-yard line and sent the rhinoceros off right tackle. When he got to the line of scrimmage, he was met with a bang, and down he went. No gain. "Who made that tackle?" queried the rabbit. "I did!" replied the centipede. On the second play, the big animals sent the elephant off left tackle. Whop. He was met at the line of scrimmage again. No gain. "Who made that tackle?" asked the rabbit again. "I did!" said the centipede. On the third play, the big animals sent the lion up the middle. Bang. Down again, no gain. "Who made that tackle?" cried the rabbit again. "I did!" replied the centipede. "Where were you in the first half?" "I was in the locker room lacing up my shoes!"

Too many gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and their parents and friends are still in the locker room lacing up their shoes. We need everyone playing the game. It is always easy to find an excuse, to rationalize not sharing your personal account with a homophobic relative or friend. Out is better. Take it from someone who has lived it both ways. When you are out, good things happen. People are willing to share their own intimate stories when they realize that you are someone with a sympathetic ear. You no longer need to live in fear, fear that someone will discover your little secret. Too often, someone will be hurt and not be able to understand why you chose to keep them uninformed. Having an opportunity to hear someone's story and share your own perspective is tremendously rewarding. The morning after Craig and I were featured on a local TV news program, I got three calls from fellow physicians thanking me for sharing our story and telling me about a sibling or child of their own who was homosexual. As members of the informed citizenry, we must work together,
first to get comfortable with the concept that homosexuals are just as capable of moral relationships as are heterosexuals, and, second, to be willing to articulate that position publicly.

Finally, I pay tribute to our straight friends who have stood by us and offered their support and acceptance, as well as to members of our own extended family for their unconditional love. A special thanks, most recently, to Ed Firmage for his courageous stand on the steps of the Utah State Capitol Building, in 1996, and for the moving account of his own evolution from a position of uninterested, uninformed spectator to an outspoken, public crusader. To parents struggling with the knowledge that a child is gay: without you, our lives would be so barren. Thank you for loving, for supporting, and for making the effort to get solid information on which to make your own judgments about this complex, fascinating phenomenon.

I also express my own deepest disappointment that we don’t have more Ed Firmages out there. Too many of our good Church members stand by and watch the hurt and anguish inflicted on our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered brothers and sisters, and on us, their parents and friends, by unthinking, insensitive, uninformed individuals. Too many declare for themselves an “ethical exemption,” and simply decide to not get involved. I often think of Bob Dylan’s lament: “How many times can a man turn his head and pretend he just doesn’t see? . . . How many ears must one man have, before he can hear people cry? The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind, the answer is blowin’ in the wind.”

The closing lines to the musical Les Misérables articulate my hopes and feelings about this issue:

Do you hear the people sing
Lost in the valley of the night?
It is the music of a people
Who are climbing to the light.

For the wretched of the earth
There is a flame that never dies.
Even the darkest night will end
And the sun will rise.

They will live again in freedom
In the garden of the Lord.
They will walk behind the plough-share
They will put away the sword.
The chain will be broken
And all men will have their reward.

Will you join in our crusade?
Who will be strong and stand with me?
Somewhere beyond the barricade
Is there a world you long to see?
Do you hear the people sing
Say, do you hear that distant drums?
It is the future that they bring
When tomorrow comes!

NOTES

7. Andrew Sullivan, 55.

AN ACHE

What shall I do with this green territory, and blue vale of your body?
I know, I can no longer fidget or flounder about.
Would I had lips enough to know how kisses inflame the weeds of ageing and rafters of our wisdom and knowledge!
Would I had mouths enough to mouth your froth-bedecked swirl of hunger in the dark!
No, no, death is no longer a toy I can play with.
Between the promontory of my tone’s whiteness and this evening moon’s inchoate coyness, your whispers are hung like an ache!

—NIRANJAN MOHANTY