

**Jerry Miller**

Q: OK, this is Kathy Staley with Jerry Miller on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010, talking about your involvement in western North Carolina with the LGBT population. Could you start out giving your age, where you were born and raised, and when you came to western North Carolina?

A: OK. Age is 75. And I was born in a small town in southern Indiana. And my last parish was in Bennington, Vermont, so we retired in 1996 and came down here to live.

Q: OK. What about Henderson County, is that where you moved to as your retirement home? What attracted you to Henderson County from having lived in so many different places previously?

A: I think it was the climate. We thought it would be better than going further south and getting too hot. And we like the mountains, so we -- we were in the mountains in Vermont, so moved down here. And then we found a place to buy. That was one of the stipulations we had. We'd always lived in a parsonage, and so we had to buy a house. And so we had bought the house in '86, and rented it out until '96.

Q: So was it more of a summer home, or just completely rented it out for those 10 years?

A: No, completely rented it out.

Q: OK. Could you talk a little bit about your involvement with PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)? Because I know that you were involved with PFLAG and the Metropolitan Community Church, but when did you start becoming with both?

A: When we were in Exeter, New Hampshire, we found out our middle son was gay. But we stayed in the closet for 10 years, because we didn't know that there was such a thing as PFLAG. There was one close by, but we didn't know about it, and we were closeted basically. Because we were American Baptists, but while the American Baptists are liberal, there are some conservative churches. And our church was a little in the middle, but we were concerned that they might not accept the fact that we were accepting of our gay son. So we didn't find PFLAG until we moved to Bennington, Vermont. And then we found a chapter across the state line, so into Massachusetts, and thought that was safe, so we began down there. And we we're still pretty much closeted as far as the church was concerned, but finally when our denomination came out as passing a resolution that homosexuality is inconsistent with the teachings of Scriptures, then we found it necessary to come out to our church. And there was really no big backlash or

anything. People accepted the fact that we loved our gay son, and that was the main thing. So that was back in -- let's see, that have been back in about '91 or '92, when we found PFLAG. And so I became President after a while there. And then we moved here, to Hendersonville, and got involved in the PFLAG here. And then when we had our interims, in Ohio and in Pennsylvania, we got in the PFLAG chapters there as well. And so down here, I was finally approached to see if I would be Regional Director of PFLAG. And so I was for about six years I guess Regional Director. I'm no longer. I was term-limited, and so -- and my wife is glad of that. (chuckles)

Q: Where was your region? What did it cover?

A: South Atlantic covered North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. We had 35 different chapters, give or take some -- we'd lose some and gain some, as you well know. (chuckles)

Q: One of the things that we're interested in is comparing Appalachian mores and how people act and treat each other in Appalachia to other places where other people have lived. And I was curious as to how the membership and activities and just rapport from the different chapters that you have personally been involved in, and then later

as the Regional Director, what your comparisons to the different chapters that you worked with as a whole.

A: Our chapter that we became a part of dwindled, as many chapters do. It was very active when we first got into it. It had, oh, 15 members -- pretty active.

Q: And this is the one in Massachusetts or in Henderson County?

A: In Massachusetts, right. And so then our -- then the other chapter that we were involved in Ohio was a small chapter, because it's in a small area. And the same was true in Pennsylvania -- it was a larger. Because actually we joined -- we went over into Ohio, but that was the closest chapter. And it was in a larger area, so it was quite large. Probably 25 or 30 members, something like that. And then when we came down here and got involved, it has pretty much always been a struggling chapter. From time to time we've had some gays and lesbians be involved, and when they were, that was -- the chapter was a little more active. But chapters in Hendersonville is basically been a support group, and we haven't really done a lot of things as a chapter. I've done some things as Regional Director and as the President of the -- I took over Presidency this last -- well, as soon as they -- I guess in November, as soon as I got my -- finished my term in the national

[way?]. The person that was in charge has been waiting for me to do that, so she said, "Now you've got it." (chuckle) As you know how that works, right. And I guess as I've worked as Regional Director -- around the larger cities of course, generally where your chapters are a little larger. But now, I think in the Asheville -- like in Asheville chapter was very strong for a while. But it dwindled down, and now it's no longer in existence. So actually we're the only game in town for about 30, 40 miles around. More than that probably. You have to get over to Greensboro and that area before there's an active chapter now. And so it's -- I think those chapters that have had active gay and lesbian members of the chapter have been much stronger. Because they had the youth. And they've got more energy. And many of the parents, you know, they're OK with it, and so they don't get it that when you no longer need PFLAG, PFLAG needs you. And so the parents quit coming, and so the -- But that interest is still there with the gays and lesbians, they're living it all the time. It's not anything that they get used to, I think. And so I've found that those chapters that have an active group of GLBT people in it are much more active.

Q: Do you find that the chapters with active LGBT people are in areas where PFLAG is the only game in town?

A: By and large, yeah.

Q: So this would be true in more rural areas? Or where would it be?

A: Yeah, rural areas, and small towns I guess you ought to -- you would say, right. Yeah, I think that's right.

Q: Someone told me recently that in Hendersonville there was a showing of *For the Bible Tells Me So*.

A: Mm hm.

Q: Could you tell me what had happened that led to the showing, and how it was received in the county?

A: Yeah. Actually, it started back a couple -- about three or four years ago, when one of the large Southern Baptist churches had a conference on helping gays and lesbians come out of their destructive lifestyle. And so from that several of us met, and we formed what was called -- a group called Love Welcomes All. And that was made up of -- mainly of clergy of a couple or three different churches. And from that we began to try to educate the community. So we had -- three years we had an all-day conference, bringing in speakers and having workshops. And so in the process, I began to -- I had heard about this *For the Bible Tells Me So*. Well, as a matter of fact, I went down to Greenville and saw it. And then we decided to bring it here. And so we had it in the library. We had about

probably 70 people. They came out really well. And it was -- it wasn't publicized as well as we might of, or we might have had more. But that was funny.

Q: Was that intentional, or --

A: No, it was just one of those things. You can't -- we didn't have the money to publicize it via -- Let's see. We did finally take some money and put it on a marquee for a while. But that -- I don't think that really helped anything. I think we wasted the money there. But the PFLAG chapter is the one who sponsored the video itself, and helped provide the funds for it, and that sort of thing. And the Love Welcomes All group are now beginning to sponsor -- they're sponsoring Veritas. Have you seen Veritas?

Q: Could you talk about that?

A: I haven't seen it yet. It's done by a local producer. He's traveled all over and interviewed people from, you know, different -- actually interviewed gays and lesbians, primarily I think. And so it's a compilation of stories of the struggles people have had with coming out, and with being accepted or not accepted. And it -- let's see, we'll be -- Love Welcomes All will be showing it in May. And that's available I think. We have a copy, Love Welcomes All has a copy. No, I guess New Creation has the copy that

the producer gave to us. So that's available, if anybody's interested in it.

Q: Could you talk a little bit more about how Love Welcomes All was created? You know, what denominations were involved.

A: To begin with, it was the Unitarians and New Creation. And then we brought in the Trinity Presbyterian Church. And now we have the United Church of Christ, or UCC, church, and an Episcopal clergyperson, and a couple of lay people involved in that.

Q: And what counties are they covering?

A: Actually we've been concentrating on Henderson County, but we're also -- we've been drawing people in from Brevard, and a couple of times Asheville. But Asheville is tough to come south. They expect us to come north, but they don't want to come south. (chuckles) And so we've actually -- Love Welcomes All, our person within that did some research and found 30-some churches that were at some measure in this area, that were accepting to some measure. Not all of them were willing to say that we accept them as they are. But they were welcoming them into the congregation and weren't trying to change them. So there's -- we were surprised to see that. That's counting Ash -- or Buncombe



County and Brevard. And what county is Brevard in? Polk?  
No.<sup>1</sup>

Q: I don't know.

A: And those -- yeah, Brevard area and Asheville area and Hendersonville area mainly. So we've been trying to get those people that were on the fringe involved in the things that we're doing. We're having a Bishop [John Shelby] Spong come in June to speak for us. And so that's -- we're excited about that.

Q: Yeah.

A: So maybe we'll get some of these people that are kind of on the fringe to come to something like that.

Q: What has the community response been to the events?

A: Well, the first workshop we had, we got a call -- or one of our speakers got a call -- saying that they were going to come and protest. And so we huddled together and decided, well, we'll call in the police if we need to. They were made aware, and told us what -- you know, how far people could come in without permission, and that sort of thing. And we had some people that were on the committee that were trained for handling things like that. But nobody showed. We was almost disappointed. (chuckles) So when we had the first worship service -- Love Welcomes All has gone to

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<sup>1</sup> Brevard is in Transylvania, North Carolina.

doing worship services. And our first worship service was about three months ago I guess. And we had one protestor across the street with his big sign. But that's all. And so the community has pretty much ignored us. Because they're in the majority, and so they figure, well, those guys, they're a minority. So they're not going to hurt anything, so let's don't stir it up. But several of the churches have begun to have programs to help people come out of their destructive lifestyle. I don't want to say which ones. But mainline, some of the mainline denominations have begun to have programs. So that kind of fueled our energy. We lost energy for a while, and then when one of the mainline churches decided they were going to have a workshop on that -- a second workshop -- then we got refueled again. And so we're back active now as Love Welcomes All. So I'm representing PFLAG on the Love Welcomes All committee.

Q: You've brought up New Creations a couple of times. Could you explain what New Creations is and a little bit of the history behind how it formed.

A: OK. When we first came down here we were invited to what was then called Grace Fellowship in Ash -- in Hendersonville. And the church was just so warm and welcoming. They were meeting at that time in Opportunity

House, so they didn't have their own building or anything. They were just meeting on Sundays, Sunday nights. And so we started coming there, and eventually joined there as an MC -- it was an MCC church, even though there was a lot of MCC I didn't care about.<sup>2</sup> So when Grace Fellowship was struggling -- we had some pastoral problems, and so we lost some people through that. And so we were down in numbers. We were -- for a while we were in good financial shape, but then we became like in tough financial shape. And so we merged with the Asheville MCC church. And as our two pastors were both involved in the MCC denomination on a national basis. And so they pretty much knew what was going on on the national basis. And when -- there were several things. MCC was beginning to move away from being a Christian-based denomination, and being a polyglot. They were welcoming in Wiccans, and different non-Christian groups as a part of the denomination. And I think the straw that broke the camel's back for us was when the denomination set up a liturgy for the slave-master relationship, and they set up a liturgy for the master giving communion to the slave. And for us that was demeaning. And I think that was probably the -- So we met and discussed several different alternatives, and finally

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<sup>2</sup> Metropolitan Community Church

decided that we just needed to leave the denomination. We had a speaker come from the denomination and try to -- you know, to discuss with us what our problems were. But there was no way to resolve them, so the -- One of the district representatives of MCC was also dissatisfied with it. And so we -- several of the churches got together then and formed their own denomination called The Christian Community of Churches. CCC, yeah. And so now we have about 13 churches located here and in South Carolina, and over in the middle part of North Carolina. In Greensboro, over in there. I think we have one or two over there. And we have -- let's see, we had one in the State of Washington for a while. I don't know how that happened, but -- (chuckles) I'm not too sure that that church is still involved or not, because the distance was just so great, and that sort of thing. And so now the Executive Director is a partner to our pastor, who gave up the co-pastor whenever she decided to take on the Executive Director. So now we have one pastor. And so the Executive Director resides here.

Q: OK. And how is the church strength now?

A: We've gone through ups and downs. Like many churches, there's a little thing happens, and so you -- we only have around 45 or 50 members. And recently we had some

disagreements, and six couples left that were very active in the church. And so that was quite a blow for us. But we're back now, we're struggling. We're almost back to where we're making ends meet financially. And it's a very strong church. It has an outreach. Once a month they feed the homeless in Pritchard Park, providing some of the food.<sup>3</sup> And also providing comfort bags. Like we just passed out about 60 bags, with hats and scarves and little things, food. And then once every other month they feed the veterans. There's a veteran -- well, I guess it's a homeless shelter in a sense. It's -- they took over an old hotel, you know where it is?

Q2: I don't, but I've heard.

A: Yeah. They took over an old motel. And it's kind of -- it's government run in some ways, but -- And we feed them every other month, and furnish the food. And they enjoy having us become, because they get special food. And we always feed them lots of good stuff. So they're doing that. So it's a very active little church for its size. I think we have four ordained -- five ordained clergy in that small church.

Q: Wow.

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<sup>3</sup> Pritchard Park is located in downtown Asheville.

A: People that have been disbarred, or left their -- had to leave their own denominations.

Q: Is it primarily LGBT people, or are there family members like yourself?

A: Unfortunately my wife and I are the token straights. Occasionally we have a parent come in, and that sort of thing. But to be really consistent, there hasn't been. For a while we had -- another straight couple were coming, and they moved out. And then we had another straight couple that came for a while, and they quit coming. But right now we're the straight couple. I just finished a term on the board of directors there. And so the -- I think -- You know, we find it's a great place to bring our son when he comes to visit us. Because even though the Presbyterian church we go to are welcoming -- I mean, they haven't gone through the process, but you know, they -- I've taught a couple of courses there on the Bible and homosexuality. And it's been pretty well received. And we -- they've hosted most of our -- well, all of our all-day workshops at the church. But it's -- you know, Keith and his partner would -- his husband now -- they live in New Jersey. And so they've had a civil ceremony. Our son wrote us one day an email, "Dad, Mom, I've been civilized." (laughter) So we like to have a place for them to come.

And if he wants to hold his hand, that's fine, at a table. And put their arms around each other, that's fine, when they're sitting. Which, you know, they would feel uncomfortable I think in the -- at the Presbyterian church. But -- And then, too, you know, it's just a part of trying to make a safe place for other GLBT people to come and worship. A really safe place, I guess. That's what we've -- that's our main purpose, is to -- well, we welcome all people, but we want to make sure it's a safe place for everybody.

Q: Mm hm. You had said earlier that you didn't feel like you were out when you were in Vermont as a parent of a LGBT child. Do you feel like you're out now in Henderson County?

A: Oh, wow. (chuckles) Wide out. I write letters to the editor, and put my name as a contact person for some of those things that we do. So yeah. And I've only gotten one or two nasty letters -- and that's been -- what? five or six years ago -- about something. But recently, you know, I'm no longer a part of the Ministerial Association, partially because I don't feel comfortable there. Because they can share, you know, their ministry. And when I've tried to share mine, they're not really comfortable with that. (chuckles) So it's been, you know, a growing

process, as far as coming out. And right now, we are now working with a formerly a gay-straight alliance group in the high school. They -- there was too much static, so they had to change the name. So it's Co-exist. But we're working with that group now, and trying to help them get going. And we've provided a pledge for them to get students to sign, and we gave them rainbow ribbons that they could pass out. So, you know, it's been a good experience working with them. And we met with the Principal. Myself and another PFLAG member met with the Principal last week I think and talked with him about things that we might be able to do to help them be more accepting.

Q: How -- in the, I guess it's been 14 years since you permanently moved, and how has the schools responded to LGBT youth, and how's that evolution changed?

A: A good example might be, three years ago when I tried to take the scholarship posters to one of our high schools--

Q: From PFLAG?

A: From PFLAG, right. Thank you. That when I took it to one of the guidance counselors, he said, "My Principal won't let me put it up." And so we have a good Superintendent right now. He's leaving, unfortunately. And so I mentioned to him that I was having trouble. And he said,



"Well, don't worry about it. We'll take care of it." And it was taken care of. So this year they can put it up without any problems. So it's changed. And I think -- well, I think the students are more accepting, as we've talked to. Like this high school principal felt that they were pretty accepting. The sponsors of the Co-Exist group feel that they need some education -- the students as well as the teachers. And so we hope to do some education on that. But it's really been a -- I think a big change. For the better. Yeah. But we're -- you know, when we first came down we didn't hear of any opposition. But then, as I said, four or five years ago we began to hear of the opposition. And so -- and now that -- the opposition is still out there, but we're not talking. They don't come to our events. We've been to one of their events, but they haven't come to any of our events. So there's no talking between the conservative churches and the few churches that are accepting.

Q: So the dialog isn't there yet.

A: No. No. And we've tried to have some. I've met with the pastors, one of the pastors, and tried to have a dialog. But there -- it wasn't really an open dialog. He was meeting with me to change my mind. And, you know, to say

that I'm right. So it's tough to have good dialog with really conservative churches.

Q: Do you see any differences in the experiences you're seeing in western North Carolina with other PFLAG chapters in other areas of the country? Like in North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, when you were a Regional Director?

A: Hm.

Q: Or are the differences based on something other than altitude?

A: Yeah, I think, that's true. The differences I think are based on what other games are in town. And other differences -- chapters that have been in existence for a while, the members burn out. The new chapter that started up over in the Bristol area there. They're going great guns. Because it's a new chapter, and everybody has all kinds of energy. And the other chapters have been around for a while, and the same people have tried to keep them going, and so it's tough that way. You just don't get the new parents in to keep it going. But now -- you know, you talk about differences. Even in the central part of the state there's much more openness to the GLBT issues than there is on this side of the state, I think.

Q: Are you talking about more urban areas like the Triangle and the Triad? Or all of Piedmont, North Carolina. Such as

-- you know, I'm thinking Stanley County, and Davie County, and all those counties right in there. Would you clump those in with chapters in the more progressive, more cosmopolitan --

A: Salisbury.

Q: Mm hm.

A: Uh, they're very progressive, the chapter there. And, you know, some of the areas have been able to get GLBT safety measures in the state and the city governance work and that sort of thing. And we're a long ways from that over here. We're still struggling with prayer at the opening (chuckles) of the meetings. So, you know, it's a process. When they -- But, you know, that's just a hint of where -- that the prayer at the beginning of meetings has to be in Jesus' name. And so that's just a symptom of the men -- I hate to say mentality, I don't mean it as a put down. But as the thinking, I guess I wanted to say, of the majority of the people up here in this area.

Q: I was curious how neighbors and other people that you know outside of your LGBT community activities have responded to you directly, particularly after you've had your name in the newspaper.

A: Well, the people at Trinity Church have responded very well. I've participated -- I've preached there a couple of

times, and participated in the worship service, and taught a couple classes. And we've been very out and open that we have a gay son and we're very supportive of him. And that we believe that everybody should have the same equal rights. And so everybody doesn't agree with that, but they are accepting of us. And so when we go out to lunch with our Trinity friends, we can talk about our gay son and his husband. And so we just try to bring that up if it's convenient. We don't try to force it, but if something is said that there's an opening, then we talk about our gay son and his husband. And that sets some people back. But most people have accepted it. And our neighbors -- we have a Seventh Day Adventist, and he knows our son is gay, but when our son comes, he's very friendly with him. And so I think some of the neighbors probably aren't -- wouldn't be accepting. I have one who's very -- very Southern in his thinking, as far as -- you know, a staunch Republican, and that sort of thing, and I don't think would be very accepting. But by and large, people have been accepting I think. We fly a rainbow flag on our porch. We didn't for quite a while. But then we decided, 'well, let's fly one.' And the only comment we got was, a lesbian couple that lives in the neighborhood said, "Oh, it's good to know that you're accepting." So they didn't know that we were

accepting until that time. So, you know, it's -- we don't hide it. And like, you know, I guess there's some danger of, you know, that wacky person. But we've decided that we have to take that chance, because we can't just keep quiet because of fear. Yeah, I think that's right.

Q: Some people have theorized that there are pockets of accepting communities -- like Boone, Asheville, I've heard Black Mountain listed, Burnsville is going towards acceptance -- based on either a liberal arts college --

A: Mm hm.

Q: -- or a -- well, arts community.

A: Yeah. Right.

Q: Do you see that to be true? Or do you think there's some other commonality where people are being -- becoming more accepting of LGBT issues?

A: I haven't discovered any that -- the tie-in with the university seems to be -- although we've got -- you know, we've got a college out here, we've got a couple of colleges. And Brevard College you'd think might be open, but they're very closed, it's hard to get anything going there. They now have a group that meets that's called Neighbors for Equality, that are working on GLBT issues. But I haven't been able to make much inroad yet. They can't -- they couldn't get the -- they couldn't pass out

literature in the high schools. The Superintendent wouldn't let them. So, you know, it isn't just -- I mean, not all of those communities that have liberal arts colleges are welcoming. So it must be the faculty, maybe, you know, that let -- have a faculty that is open, like Boone, and that sort of thing. So it's something more than just a liberal arts college. And I haven't put my finger on it yet. It'd be interesting to be able to see that, what might be underneath that. I hope you find it out.

Q: Is there anything else you wanted to bring out that I didn't ask directly about?

A: Maybe my own struggle.

Q: OK.

A: Yeah. I guess my first experience with a gay person was in seminary. And it was a gay person that was in a mental institution, and so that was not necessarily (chuckles) a good introduction. Well, I guess -- you know, and then I was in the Navy, and you heard about these gay people, and that sort of thing. But nothing that really stuck with me. But -- And working with this gay person, my instructor said, you know, just treat them like you would anybody else, and don't make that an issue. And so I tried to do that. And so in my first -- my second church, there was -- which was in Exeter, New Hampshire -- there was a movement

to have gay and lesbian people be more accepted. And so there was a, I guess you would say a group that had a panel who came in and talked to -- and so I began to see, oh, those people aren't so bad after all. But then -- And so I began -- there were -- some reason or another, gay people started coming to me in the church, for counseling. And I tried to do like counselors are supposed to do, and just to set aside any -- my own feelings about that person, and to try to just accept them as they were. And was doing a pretty good job, I think. There was some that had tried to change and weren't able to change. And then one day I found out we had a gay son. And even though in my head I began to accept those people, something happened inside. And I said -- you know, not that I didn't love my son, but I feared for him. We were in Exeter at the time and there was -- [tape noise] There was all kinds of gay bashing going on up in Maine, and that sort of thing. And so we really feared for him. I came out to a ministers group, but my wife didn't have anybody to come out to. And so my concern was for Keith's safety. And also that he would never have a lifetime partner. And of course he wouldn't give me any grandkids. (laughter) Those typical things. And so I was -- I prayed that God would change Keith. Even though, you know, I didn't know how that would happen.

Because I hadn't seen anybody change, but. And so I would pray that God would change Keith. And one day I was having that prayer, and I heard this -- inside, I heard this voice saying, "Jerry, you know I don't work that way." I thought -- all the scripture passages I'd put on a shelf, because I couldn't deal with them. I couldn't reconcile my interp -- you know, the traditional interpretation with what I saw in my son and other gay people. So I just put those -- I didn't deal with them at all. And so I knew this wasn't scripture. And then -- you don't have to get this part, but -- then I realized where it came from. It was from Bill Cosby's "Noah." And -- do you know--

Q2: I don't know that one, no.

Q: Tell this story, it's great.

A: Noah's building an ark.

Q2: Uh huh.

A: And God says bring in all the animals two by two by two. And Noah's getting all fed up with all that mess in the boat, and all that sort of stuff. And God says, "Noah, you're going to have to take one of those hippopotamuses out, you got two males." And Noah says, "Great golly gosh. I'm sick and tired of this stuff! You change one." And God says, "Noah, you know I don't work that way." And so that was my realization, right then. That I could accept



my son [too?]. And so that was my turning point. God didn't change my son, God changed me. That was -- it was a significant incident. And that was the beginning of my total acceptance of my son, and other gay people. OK, that was it. Sorry, I didn't mean to tear up on you. Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

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#### **Follow-up Questions**

Q: What impact has your advocacy efforts had on your family? What considerations led you to decide to be fully out about your parenting a gay son? Where there differences between VT and NC?

A: We decided when our denomination (American Baptist Churches) voted that "homosexuality is inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible" we needed to emphasize another point of view, which many in our denomination were already voicing. I came out as being supportive of our gay son in a Sunday morning sermon and no one left the church at that time. We went back into the closet when we took an interim pastorate in Penn, because that church was already struggling with big issues. It was so uncomfortable in the

closet that we vowed that we would never do that again. Now we take every opportunity when it seems natural to talk about our gay son and his husband and our involvement with our "inclusive" church. That description often leads to some good conversation.

We came out to our extended family in a Christmas newsletter many years ago. While not everyone agrees with our stance, we are beginning to have occasional conversations with most of them. It was especially important when my youngest brother (there are 6 siblings in our family) discovered that both of his daughters were lesbian. One daughter and her partner now have 2 children by artificial insemination who are loved by the whole family. There was no problem with our oldest son, but our youngest son struggled with it for quite some time as he is more conservative in his beliefs. Most of my family accept me as I am and if they have problems with my advocacy, they keep it to themselves. I have one cousin's husband who thinks I am way off base, and probably others do too, as I come from a pretty conservative family background. But it has not seemed to effect my relationships with them.

Vermont is more accepting of differences in general. That

is not to say that there was no opposition in Vermont. Some of my more conservative clergy friends had some real problems with the "religious" issue.