

# Family Matters...

## ADJUSTING TO A NEW NORMAL

*By Anita Worthen*

Having a gay family member brings a new normal; a new way of relating to family members, friends and to our loved one. It is not a normal that one likes, or would recommend to anyone else, but it is our normal and we have no real choice but to adjust to the way things are now. There is a bit of panic when others inquire how your son, daughter, etc. is doing. It's hard to say: "Oh, Jake is doing fine, he has a new partner. This one seems to be a very nice guy, not like his other one." In most situations I am O.K. with people asking about my son, but there are those situations when I am uncomfortable and want to change the subject. Such a time is when I have to spend several hours with my hairdresser.

Many who call me are full of hope that this ugly thing called homosexuality is only a passing dark time in their family and eventually everything will resolve itself and we all live happily ever after. Is this a realistic viewpoint? Yes, some have indeed changed and now enjoy a normal life, but that number is small, and this change didn't happen overnight, it took years of stress and trauma to make this happen. It is very discouraging when attending a parents group to hear someone say: "I have been waiting for Rick to change for 20 years now." As the years pass, rather than our loved one changing, we find we are the ones who have changed. We have learned patience, perseverance and how to accept the grace God gives us to endure difficult times. We have developed a "balanced hope." We have not abandoned hope for our loved one, but we are now prepared to endure the long, hard struggle that lays before us. Our soul cries out: "Even in this situation, Lord I trust you." We have become survivors; our faith has deepened and we now understand the meaning of "long-suffering." Yet, there are a few who turn against God because change was not instant, nor even on the horizon. The pain and disappointment has caused them to become bitter and doubting the goodness of God. They have only deepened their pain and sorrow. There is no joy in hopelessness.

In the beginning of my sad journey, I thought if relief didn't come soon, I would die. My prayer was: "God fix him now; I can't live much longer like this." But I soon found my strength in Christ. I realized I was living in a new kind of normal and I must adjust or I will die (or kill someone!). It took some time for my focus to change. I had to let the negative go and seek out that which was positive about my life. I had to develop a thankful spirit in spite of my difficulties.

Frank and I are growing older and we are entering a time of change; not for the better it seems. We are physically wearing out, it is more difficult to do what once we did without giving it much thought. But, we are reaping the benefits that came through the difficulties of the past. Those things prepared us to face new challenges. We are not asking God: "Why?" but accepting the situation we find ourselves in. These new difficulties are "normal" for our stage of life. Yet, we are determined that we will continue to serve as best we can and not be filled with self-pity or defeat. God hasn't abandoned us, He is still good and still answers much of what we pray for. We will not become disillusioned, bitter or deceived into thinking that He no longer cares for us. What He gives and what He takes away is His business, we will trust Him.

Yes, we have adjusted our hope in certain situations. Not everything we hoped for and worked for has come to pass. In a sense we have detached. We have come to recognize that this ministry and our lives are His business and are His property. We have lived with God long enough to know that the final outcome is always good, good for us and good for His kingdom. This is not to say however, that we don't wonder how all this will work itself out. It seems that as we are less capable to do ministry the more the ministry increases. We once had time to have days off and to attend to necessary health appointments, now it seems we seldom have an hour to ourselves. Yet, we love this ministry; God's ministry. Let me close with a wonderful prayer I found in a book called: "Now I Lay My Isaac Down" by Carol Kent.

"Lord, we are desperate for You! This thing that has happened is too big for us to deal with. We are so mad, so disappointed, and so hurt that You didn't rescue our son. We are mad, but we are no longer mad at You. We are furious with Satan! He will *not* destroy us! He cannot destroy our son! Regardless of what he has done...he belongs to You."

What an honest prayer. This mother has not only adjusted her hope, but has also adjusted her anger. May it be so with you.

Anita