

Life With A Gay Father: My Story

By Dawn Stefanowicz

Editor's Note: The following is a paper by Dawn Stefanowicz, a woman who was reared in a gay-headed household. It is reprinted from an article published in 2005, titled "Same-Sex Marriage: Have The Best Interests Of Children Been Considered?" In 2007, Mrs. Stefanowicz's book, Out From Under: Getting Clear Of The Wreckage Of A Sexually-Disordered Home will be published. Her web site features additional information about her life and her outreach to adult victims of gay homes: www.dawnstefanowicz.com.



Dawn Stefanowicz

My name is Dawn Stefanowicz, and I grew up in a homosexual household during the 60s and 70s in Toronto, exposed to many different people in GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, bisexual, Transsexual) subcultures, and explicit sexual practices. I am currently writing a book, soon to be published, on this experience. As well, I was a witness at the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on Bill C-250 (hate crimes), and I have presented at the local school board.

My biggest concern is that children are not being discussed in this same-sex marriage debate. Yet, won't the next step for gay activists be to ask for legal adoption of children if same-sex marriage is legalized? I have considered some of the potential physical and psychological health risks for children raised in this situation. I was at high risk of exposure to contagious STDs due to sexual molestation, my father's high-risk sexual behaviors, and multiple partners. Even when my father was in what looked like monogamous relationships, he continued cruising for anonymous sex.

I came to deeply care for, love and compassionately understand my dad. He shared his life regrets with me. Unfortunately, my father, as a child, was sexually and physically abused by older males. Due to this, he lived with depression, control issues, anger outbursts, suicidal tendencies, and sexual compulsions. He tried to fulfill his legitimate needs for his father's affirmation, affection and attention with transient and promiscuous relationships.

He and his partners were exposed to various contagious STD's as they traveled across North America. My father's (ex)partners, whom I had deep caring feelings for and associated with, had

drastically shortened lives due to suicide, contracting HIV or AIDS. Sadly, my father died of AIDS in 1991.

Are my childhood experiences unique? According to a growing number of personal testimonies, experts, and organizations, there is mounting evidence of strong commonalities to my personal experiences. Not only do children do best with both a mother and a father in a lifelong marriage bond, children need responsible monogamous parents who have no extramarital sexual partners. Parental promiscuity, abuse and divorce are not good for children.

If same-sex marriage is legalized, a person, couple or group who practice any form of sexual behavior would eventually be able to obtain children through previous heterosexual relationships, new reproductive technologies, and adoption due to the undefined term "sexual orientation." This would force all public and private adoption agencies to hand over children into experimental relationships or risk charges of discrimination.

What is the most suitable environment for children to be born or adopted into? The many personal, professional and social experiences with my father did not teach me respect for morality, authority, marriage, and paternal love. I felt fearfully silenced as I was not allowed to talk about my dad, his male housemates, his lifestyle and encounters within the subcultures without being browbeaten and threatened by my father.

While I lived at home, I had to live by his rules. Yes, I loved my dad. However, I felt abandoned and neglected as my needs were not met since my father would often leave suddenly to be with his partners for days. His partners were not really interested in me. I was outraged at the incidences of same-sex domestic abuse, sexual advances toward minors, and loss of sexual partners as if people were only commodities. I sought comfort looking for my father's love from boyfriends starting at 12 years old.

From a young age, I was exposed to explicit sexual speech, self-indulgent lifestyles, varied GLBT subcultures and gay vacation spots. Sex looked gratuitous to me as a child. I was exposed to all inclusive manifestations of sexuality including bathhouse sex, cross-dressing, sodomy, pornography, gay nudity, lesbianism, bisexuality, minor recruitment, voyeurism and exhibitionism. Sado-masochism was alluded to and aspects demonstrated. Alcohol and drugs were often contributing factors to lower inhi-

bitions in my father's relationships.

My father prized unisex dressing, gender-neutral aspects and a famous cross-dressing icon when I was eight years old. I did not see the value of biological complementing differences of male and female or think about marriage. I made vows to never have children since I had not grown up in a safe, sacrificial, child-centered home environment.

Due to my life experience, I ask, "Can children really perform their best academically, financially, psychologically, socially and behaviorally in such experimental home situations?" I can tell you that I suffered long term in this situation, and this has been professionally documented.

Over two decades of direct exposure to these stressful experiences caused me insecurity, depression, suicidal thoughts, dread, anxiousness, low self-esteem, sleeplessness and sexuality confusion. My conscience and innocence were seriously damaged. I witnessed that every other family member suffered severely as well.

It took me until I was into my 20s and 30s, after making major life choices, to begin to realize how being raised in this environment affected me. My healing encompassed facing reality, accepting long-term consequences, and offering forgiveness. Can you imagine being forced to tolerate unstable relationships and diverse sexual practices from a young age and how this affected my development? My gender identity, psychological well-being, and peer relationships were affected. Unfortunately, it was not until my father, his sexual partners and my mother had died, that I was free to speak publicly about my experiences.

I believe same-sex marriage will dispose of unique values esteemed within marriage as recognized throughout history. Marriage needs to remain a societal foundation that constitutes, represents, and defends the inherently procreative relationship between the husband and the wife for the welfare of their biological children. Children need consistent appropriate boundaries and secure expressions of emotional intimacy that are not sexualized in the home and community.

The legal term "sexual orientation" is far too open-ended. Using that broad terminology, a person practicing pansexuality, which is diverse sexual expression, could not be discriminated against even with children present. Are the government and judicial systems playing games with children, forcing upstanding citizens to tolerate all forms of diverse sexual expression against their will, conscience and or religious freedom?

Why does such a small, unrepresentative clique within the GLBT subcultures want same-sex marriage? Mr. John McKellar,

Executive Director of H.O.P.E. (Homosexuals Opposed to Pride Extremism) has stated, and I quote: "It is selfish and rude for the gay community to push same-sex marriage legislation and redefine society's traditions and conventions for our own self-indulgence Federal and provincial laws are being changed and the traditional values are being compromised just to appease a tiny, self-anointed clique."

In my opinion, same-sex marriage will put the human rights of the individual in a higher place than what is best for society, families and especially children. Canadian citizens should decide and not our judges. Human rights were meant to protect the individual and not groups. In this crucial debate, children's human rights have become secondary, ignored and denied.

Moreover, if Canadians do not stop same-sex marriage, we will lose all of our freedom to address issues around sexuality with moral and religious vigor. The gay agenda will prevail in every Canadian public and private academic environment, inundating school environments with advocacy and sexually explicit resources and curriculum that mock parents' authority, moral rectitude, and religious traditions.

Already this is happening under the banner of anti-bullying, safe schools' policies and through Gay-Straight Alliances. In reality, these policies provide a direct legal entranceway of indoctrination, desensitization, personal and political recruitment of our vulnerable children by some gay activists within our schools while silencing all students who oppose the gay agenda.

Similarly, all those who oppose the Canadian laws recognizing same-sex marriage would not be allowed to speak, express or gesture opposition, even on religious grounds. Look how the hate crime legislation Bill C-250 has instilled fear and is silencing the church. Did you know that the separation of church and state was enacted to protect religious freedom and conscience? Will religious freedom be trumped by sexual freedom? Will religious faith expressions and practices by individuals and organizations be prohibited by such bills as C-38 and others? We have an obligation, for the sake of our children, to speak freely and to direct the laws of our land.

Will the Canadian government and judges legally promote unhealthy and unsound environments that encourage motherless and fatherless units through same-sex marriage? Ultimately, children will be the real victims and losers if same-sex marriage is legally enacted. What hope can I offer innocent children who have no voice? What price is Canada willing to pay for sexual freedom, tolerance and diversity? Is that price children's lives? Government and judges need to advance and defend marriage as between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others for the sake of our children. ●

Stay Informed

Keep updated on the latest in the field of reorientation therapy and trends in the study of sexual orientation by accessing NARTH's web site. The site is updated frequently.

erance for homosexuals. Some of the results of education include: a deeper and more widespread societal understanding of their struggles, increased compassion for the hurts they have encountered, and decreased hostility. Hence, there are many advantages for society in general and for homosexuals in particular when expansive explanations are provided. Tolerance and respect are the result of education, even for those who do not approve or accept homosexuality as a moral lifestyle. Therefore, it is not only important to educate on this issue, but appropriate and beneficial to do so. Education on the developmental contributors to homosexuality does not have to be viewed negatively by homosexuals. As I have educated on this important topic I have found that education produces positive results for all people.

Education on this issue includes information about environmental contributors to same-sex attractions. When I educate I begin by explaining the various developmental needs children have, needs for connection with the same-sex parent and same-sex peers. I explain that children are not simply born with a sense of their own gender but that their gender identity is formed through connections and interactions with others, primarily members of the same sex. I explain that children look first to their same-sex parent and then to same-sex peers to form their own identity: to understand how they measure up, how they fit in, what value they have as male or female, what it means to be male or female, etc. When children do not form healthy same-sex bonds and their needs for same-sex connection go unmet, these needs do not go away; they simply intensify or take on another form. Typically, near puberty, these unmet needs take on a sexual form, the emotional needs become sexualized (Satinover, 1996).

These developmental factors, combined with genetic temperament, which impacts perceptions, all go into the development of homosexuality. Other factors such as sexual abuse or traumatic experiences may also contribute to the formation of same-sex attractions. Since this information is largely unknown to the general public, it is very important that we begin to share it in order to generate a more widespread understanding of this issue.

I believe there are various ways of educating on this issue, some more effective than others. I believe that if we are going to be effective in our educational attempts we must do so in non-offensive ways, in ways that promote tolerance and are acceptable to all people, both heterosexuals and homosexuals alike. Although education on the origins of homosexuality has not always been well-received, I believe there is a way of doing so that can be non-offensive. As I have educated on this issue, I have found a way that seems to work well. I believe there are two keys to educating effectively: our motivation behind educating and our emphasis in educating.

Motivated By Compassion

Our motivations for what we do greatly impact the outcome of what we do. Our motivations are often evident in the delivery of the information we are sharing. The motivation that seems to yield the most acceptable results is love. I have a brother who is gay, whom I love dearly, and with whom I have a wonderful rela-

tionship. When I educate the public on the causes of homosexuality, it is my love for my brother that motivates me. My love for him produces in me a desire to raise awareness about the origins of homosexuality. My goal in educating is to decrease hostility towards homosexuals (especially within conservative faith-groups) and to increase compassion. With that as my goal, I share the information in a way that is not only palatable to heterosexuals, but also acceptable to my homosexual brother, his partner, and their homosexual friends.

On the other hand, if our motivation to speak on this topic is anger or outrage at homosexuals, I believe we lose some effectiveness. When anger motivates, the message we offer tends to contain a tone of hostility, which is not usually as palatable as a message given in love. When the information about homosexuality is presented in anger, the message often becomes lost in the delivery. An approach to education which conveys anger or intolerance will repel, rather than attract, listeners. I believe that education on this issue is absolutely imperative, but it must be done in a way in which people will listen, a way which draws people in rather than turns them away.

In addition to having motives that help rather than hinder, our emphasis, that is, what we choose to emphasize or highlight, also makes a big difference in regards to our effectiveness. I believe that we must highlight the positive contributions of education on society, positive implications for both heterosexual and homosexual members of society. Educating on this issue can have a positive impact on homosexuals in that education offers a more complete understanding than either of the two inaccurate explanations which are currently promoted. When we educate, we are most effective if we emphasize the benefits of sharing the information, that is, a complete understanding of the issue yields more positive results for everyone than either of the two popular misconceptions. For example, in contrast with the false idea that homosexuality is a choice, understanding the developmental nature of same sex attractions yields a much more compassionate response towards homosexuals. When people who believe it is a choice are educated on this issue, they gain understanding, have greater levels of compassion, and become less judgmental. Tolerance is the outcome when people who believe it is a choice learn that it is instead developmental. All people, including homosexuals, should be treated with respect and dignity even by those who may not approve of their lifestyle.

When I have educated on this issue to conservative-faith groups, greater kindness to homosexuals is often the result. I continually receive feedback from seminar attendees regarding their new resolve to become more loving and kind to homosexuals. One person, who recently attended one of these seminars, doing so reluctantly, at his pastor's bidding, was so impacted that he stood up at the end of the seminar to share his newly gained insights. He said that he had a co-worker who was gay, and of whom he strongly disapproved. He explained that he regularly demonstrated his disapproval by treating his co-worker with contempt. However, upon attending our seminar, he expressed a new awareness of the need to simply love his co-worker and show kindness to him instead of contempt. When participants learn of the needs

humans have for same-sex connection and the results of those unmet needs, compassion is their response.

Understanding the developmental nature of homosexuality is not only a better alternative to believing it is a choice, but it is also better in some ways than believing it is solely biological. Believing homosexuality is biologically based is actually quite limiting to homosexuals, and therefore has negative implications. For homosexuals who are not happy in the gay lifestyle, the biological explanation gives no hope for any other option.

I have met countless homosexuals who were told by psychotherapists that their condition was unchangeable, despite the fact that they were very miserable and were seeking change. Believing that it is biologically based implies that change is impossible. In a society that highly esteems freedom of choice, it seems ironic that we accept and promote a theory of homosexuality that leaves the homosexual with no other options. Taking away all hope for change seems restrictive at best, detrimental at worst. On the other hand, when we educate we promote the truth that people can seek change if they so desire.

The developmental understanding of homosexuality offers more options and increased hope. Of course, educating does not mean

that homosexuals who are uninterested in changing should ever be coerced into trying to change against their will.

Information about the developmental contributors to homosexuality must be shared. Our society has been saturated with misinformation. Yet educating must be done in a way that is effective, a way that promotes kindness and compassion. Educating effectively requires right motives and a right approach. I believe if we lovingly share information that has positive implications for all people it will be much better received.

The need for education is great, but the way it is done will determine how effectively that need is met. As we educate, it is imperative that we consider our motives and our emphasis and that we seek to promote a greater understanding in the most effective way possible. ●

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