

NEWS & NOTES



STRAIGHT SPOUSE *network* NEWSLETTER

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A UNIQUE COMMUNITY

News&Notes is a free publication which goes out to all Straight Spouse Network Support Group Facilitators, Support Contacts, their past and present Straight Spouse group members, their families and friends, Straight Spouse Network Supporters and a community following. We ask you all to share it widely so people understand the scope of the Straight Spouse Experience.

When you discover that you're married to a closeted LGBT person, it changes your life forever. You face challenges that people in heterosexual marriages do not experience. Not everyone understands the uniqueness of the Straight Spouse Experience. There are personal struggles, decisions and after effects Straight Spouses face which are all related to another person coming out as LGBT. Too many times, their coming-out eclipses the resulting pain and challenges the straight spouse will experience.

Straight Spouses also become a part of a phenomenon which is much bigger than their own private experiences. Most of us are shocked to learn that there are so many of us, all over the world. And often we find that we are misunderstood and even maligned. Professional therapy often falls short because clinicians have no frame of reference. That is why the support networks and the personal support group models the Straight Spouse Network has created are so significant. We become important partners in helping one another during our time of confusion, sorrow and healing.

We also need to tell the world who we are and why the Straight Spouse Experience is significant in all aspects of life. We need to help society comprehend the relevance of LGBT

rights to straight people. If those rights were fully accepted, maybe millions of straight people wouldn't be going through divorces right now.

We strive to discover, explore and discuss significant world events, social trends and political issues that may impact Straight Spouses, their LGBT spouses, ex-spouses and their families. We reach out to enlighten others about our experiences through our website, our Blog and Forum, News&Notes newsletters, Podcasts, gatherings, public speaking and when we're featured in outside publications. We can also do it just by talking about our organization and our experiences with our families, friends and even strangers. We should never be afraid to tell the truth.

- Linda Ehle-Callens, Straight Spouse Network Staff

SUBMISSIONS WELCOME

This newsletter goes out to thousands of people worldwide. It's also posted on several Facebook groups and is available to thousands of people who visit our website. That means this publication has unequaled, expansive exposure.

This is your newsletter. We want to hear from you! We welcome well-written, original articles, relevant news issues, upcoming events, personal stories, photos, poetry and art pertaining to the Straight Spouse Experience. All submissions will be screened for approval and professionally edited. Then a final proof will be sent to the contributor for approval.

Send submissions for consideration, as pdfs or Word documents to Executive Director Daphne Callen at SSNDaphneChicago@gmail.com

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Straight Spouse Network,

After receiving the Straight Spouse Network newsletter, I was inspired by what I read. And I was inspired to write down my thoughts and my pain.

Thank you.... thank you....thank you.... I'm trying to find myself, trying to control the wave of tears. My support group is truly helping.

- Sandra P.

See Sandra's article on page 5

ABOUT AMITY



Amity Pierce Buxton

Amity Pierce Buxton,
Straight Spouse Network Founder

Recently Amity suffered a fall fracturing her femur. She's recovering well and would appreciate good thoughts from all of us, but as an alternative to sending cards or flowers, she has suggested that her friends and supporters make a donation to the Straight Spouse Network. Amity, we all wish you a very speedy recovery!

To make a donation, go to www.straightspouse.org and click the button in the SUPPORT THE STRAIGHT SPOUSE NETWORK box in the right column of our home page.

from Carter Cortelyou, the Board President,
The Board of Directors and the Straight Spouse Network Staff

Give and Take Perks & Challenges of Being a Support Group Facilitator/Contact

Being a Straight Spouse Network Support Group Facilitator or a Support Contact is one of the most rewarding experiences a person can have. They give their personal time, energy and empathy to help others. And they do that strictly on a volunteer basis. These 158 women and men are all survivors of the Straight Spouse Experience. They have jobs, families, and responsibilities like everyone else, yet they make time for others who need support, like they once did.

But, as rewarding and perhaps cathartic as it can be, being a Facilitator/Contact is also a lot of work, and it isn't always easy. They are responsible for maintaining email lists of the people who are sent to them through Triage. If they've been a facilitator for a long time, they'll be managing a sizable list. They take time to communicate one-on-one with every new person sent to them, with long email conversations and long phone conversations. They have to juggle and adjust their own schedules to set meeting times that work as well as possible for everyone. They have to send out our newsletters and donation campaigns and participate in mandatory surveys.

Most of the Straight Spouses group members are wonderful, kind and caring people who blend in with and bond with the rest of the group. Lifetime friendships are born. Group members decide to become facilitators themselves. Sometimes a romance even blossoms.

But, there are times when we are challenged. A group member may have a down-low spouse who would not be happy about their participation in meetings, so there has to be extra discretion. Sometimes, someone just isn't a 'good fit'. Folks who are unable to get their emotions under control, can end up dominating meetings, sometimes with tearful, repetitive narratives of their experience. The disproportionate amount of 'sharing time', leaves other group members feeling left out. Sometimes they feel like leaving the group. Those situations

have to be handled delicately and diplomatically, always with every group member's best interest at heart.

For all those reasons, we've established a new venue for communication between Facilitators and Contacts. It's a great way for them to share their challenges and ask how others have handled sticky situations. Yes, indeed; our volunteers do far more than sit there and listen. They are sincere, loyal and are truly the backbone of the Straight Spouse Network. They all deserve our thanks and praise!

- Linda Ehle-Callens. Straight Spouse Network Staff

TRIAGE Crunching Numbers

We constantly monitor how many website hits we get per month. Over the past several months, we've been holding steady to about 500 hits per week. In May we had 158 new straight spouses contact us through our website's Triage request form and 38 came to us through our Triage volunteer Hotline team; all seeking support as they begin the difficult Straight Spouse journey.

Statistics are important because they demonstrate the national trends, and how our organization is key to helping all who come to us for support. In the early 90's, through our founder, Amity Buxton's research, it was determined that there were 2,000,000 straight spouses in the USA. Since then, we have seen an increased number of people coming to us for support, which is an indicator that the 2 million number has likely increased. Right now we're working on new statistical studies to see what the current number is today. The challenge with that lies in the fact that even though higher numbers of LGBT people are coming out, there are still so many who are not ready to do that. So, we have our work cut out for us, but we remain dedicated to finding answers and reaching out as far as possible to help everyone who needs us.

Straight Spouse Network Triage Team

TRIGGERS

The Post Discovery Ripple Effect



I'm just shy of 3 years post discovery and most days are fine; a few are even great. Most days I think I've managed well; most days I don't feel angry. In fact, I think if there were an award for turning the other cheek, I would most certainly have won it by now.

I'm successfully co-parenting with my ex-husband. We do family things together every week. We even went on a week-long road trip to visit his family together and nobody had to be medicated or hospitalized. I have forgiven and moved past a lot, mostly for the benefit of our children. I know that he made some poor choices in how he handled things, but he was hurting and struggling with his own identity and other baggage. Ultimately, he felt self-loathing and guilt about all of it.

Don't forget, I loved this man, so despite everything, it did break my heart to see him hurting that way. So I made a conscious **EFFORT**, and dammit, it was and is hard not to beat him up about it or wallow in it forever. With therapy and over time, I've gotten better at it. Like I said, I think I'm doing a pretty good job most days. But then every once in awhile a day like today will sneak up.

Something as simple as not getting approved for a car loan, and I was instantly enraged. Then in short order, I was a sniveling mess of salt water and mucous. Granted, the triggers used to go off a lot more often, so there has been some progress. But on days like today, I can't help but feel utterly defeated because clearly I've been fooling myself. The anger is still lurking.

Then I started thinking, does it make me an epic failure as a human being because I haven't managed to completely let go of the anger? Whose expectation for letting go am I subscribing to, anyway? My friends, family, society? Over these 3 years, at some point, all of them have criticized me in some way. I'm sure they had good intentions, but at the end of the day, whose needs are they really serving by telling me to let go?

Maybe they're insisting I move on, let go of the anger because the straight spouse thing makes them uncomfortable. They don't want to acknowledge it. Perhaps it's an uncomfortable recognition that it can happen to anyone. Even them.

"...unless you've walked it, I'll thank you not to tell me what shoes I should wear."

Believe me, I am grateful for the positive things that I do have in my life. And maybe it's okay for me to be angry, maybe it's normal, and it makes me human. Maybe I'll continue to be angry from time to time, as long as I am living and struggling day-to-day with the very tangible ripple effects of being a straight spouse. Putting all the emotional betrayal and loss aside, who wouldn't be angry if they lost everything they worked so hard for? I lost my home, my car, my credit. I'm dealing with financial ruin because of someone else's failure to accept his own sexuality.

Still, some people say "It's just money, there are more important things in life". If you meet that person, tell them I said, "To quote Letterkenny, 'Get off the cross, because we need the wood.'" Maybe *they* are ready to be a saintly martyr, but I am human, and I am no longer apologizing for it.

Of *course* I get angry sometimes. This is a hard road to be on, especially because I didn't chose it. I was thrown out onto it at 80km an hour. But you know what? I'm walking it nonetheless and I'm doing the best I can, which for the most part is pretty damn good. So, unless you've walked it, I'll thank you not to tell me what shoes I should wear. And I know that some day the joys of paying for someone else's poor decisions will be over. But today is not that day.

Remember The Beatles song, "Happiness is a Warm Gun"? The gun is warm because it just went off; pull the trigger and experience happiness as a result. But Straight Spouses are supposed to rise above their triggers, to get over, or suppress their anger. I say enough is enough. Our triggers are there for a reason. Let us be free to express those feelings. We deserve respect, not shame. If you don't agree, you should probably get out of the line of fire. ♦

Jennifer Ferrante is a Straight Spouse Network Group Facilitator in Ontario, Canada, is on our Board of Directors and is part of our Speakers Bureau.

He Never Said It.

By Sandra P.

He never said he was gay. I just thought he was being a gentleman while we were dating, since he wasn't physically into me.

He never said he was gay. I thought he just wanted to hang out with his buddies for long periods of time, week-end after week-end. I just thought he didn't want me to drop by his condo because he was a messy house keeper.

He never said he was gay. I just could never pinpoint his whereabouts when he'd been out until the wee hours of the morning. I just thought he wasn't very romantic when he gave me an engagement ring he'd hidden under the bed after we had "done it".

He never said he was gay. I was trying to slow dance with him. He said, "You want it all, don't you?" I just thought he was too tired after partying and drinking at the wedding, to consummate the marriage. I just thought he was being mean when he said, "what's the matter with you?" when I dressed in a sexy nightgown on the honeymoon.

He never said he was gay, when nine days after I married him, he stopped coming home every night. Then he started sleeping in the other bedroom. I cried endlessly and begged to know what was wrong.

He never said he was gay, when I told him this behavior was not normal for newlyweds. I threatened to leave because the hurt, neglect, and lack of intimacy was emotionally killing me. He said he was a drug addict, when his absence, indifference, silence, and sexual passivity could no longer be ignored.

Ten years later...

He never said he was gay, when he would wait until I fell asleep before coming to bed, and never touching me. Or when he took a job in another city for a year and would only fly home on the week-ends.

Twenty years later...

He never said he was gay, as his emotional absence, indifference, silence, and sexual passivity continued. Or when I told him I had met

someone who had shown an interest in me and I wanted to go see him. He just dropped me off at the airport, and said "Maybe HE can give you something I CAN'T."

He never said he was gay, when his preference for intimacy style abruptly changed. I asked why a thousand times.

He never said he was gay, when he would talk to the neighbor for hours in the front yard after getting off work. I just thought he was being inconsiderate of me, while I was waiting in the house for his company.

He never said he was gay, when he discovered he had prostate cancer. He never asked me to go to any of his doctors' appointments. He just said he was going to have surgery on such and such a date. And he said that I had wished cancer on him. His anger started to slowly escalate. I repeatedly told him he was scaring me.

Thirty years later...

He never said he was gay, when he didn't acknowledge our anniversary. He was just more and more irritated with me and at whatever I said or did. He was angry that I had gotten water on the plants while washing the outside windows. He clinched his fists, started breathing heavy and looking at me with evil eyes.

He never said he was gay, when I dropped a pillow, blanket and night bag over the balcony and I drove away while his back was to me.

He never said he was gay, after it had been three weeks since we'd had a face to face conversation. Or when I told him how much I loved him. Or when I asked him to say something, anything. He only responded with, "I don't know what to say".

He never said he was gay, when I said, "Sometimes enough is enough". Or when I filed for divorce.

He's never said he is gay...*I wonder if he ever will* ♦

WE'RE GOING TO MAKE IT M.O.M. LOVE LETTER

ANONYMOUS



Dear Jean SE,

When I went to see Doctor Albright for a Zoloft prescription, he asked me, "Do you think your marriage will survive?" I said, "I don't know". But now things have taken place that have changed my perspective.

Recently, our marriage counsellor asked, "What are the reasons for being married?" Previously, we'd talked about the reasons not to separate. She told us to consider the question from a positive approach rather than the negative. I was thinking of you, asking myself, "Who is this person?" After being married thirty-four years, suddenly I found that I wasn't sure I knew you. Then I began to realize that I was dealing with two different Jeans. The first Jean is the one whom I had shared long years of married life with. We had many adventures, including raising two great children. I labeled the first one Jean Before Ellen or Jean BE. The second Jean is Jean Since Ellen or Jean SE.

During the last two years it has been difficult for me, watching you deal with past abuse and your love relationship with Ellen. The energy in your new relationship was hard to accept; I was truly afraid that you would eventually leave our marriage. Last year when I saw Dr. Albright, I was dealing with depression that was probably more severe than you realized. You were preoccupied with your new relationship and I felt as significant as a piece of household furniture. The Zoloft provided a much welcome relief from that depression and enabled me to process things without the fear of you possibly leaving me at any moment.

I recently realized that my fear of losing you and my anxiety over our love was all about Jean BE. We agreed at one point that our relationship would be different. It could never be the same as before your coming out to me and then finding Ellen. I realized that I was trying to hold onto Jean BE. But that Jean had become Jean SE. I realized that I had to let go of Jean BE and learn how to love Jean SE.

In learning to love you all over again, I find it's not like falling in love, it's an evolving love. We still have a long history, but I am learning

to love the person you are now....trying to love the previous person, holding on to what was....was the that most difficult thing.

Lasting love grows and evolves slowly; the abruptness of the new situation was a real challenge to our love. The changing reality of our love relationship was difficult for me to accept until I realized what was going on in my own thinking.

Our intimacy has decreased from what it was before. Mentally I felt I was competing with your experience of loving a woman, which you found very satisfying and fulfilling. Several rejections of overtures and I had pretty much given up on sex. I found that the Zoloft had a very significant negative affect on my libido, including self stimulation, which had become a major outlet for my sexual energy.

Now your relationship with Ellen is settling down, and you're aware again that I exist. I feel comfortable that Ellen's moving close by will be positive. I think we can live in a polyamorous relationship. I accept that we'll experience some challenging times as we live out this new reality. Our saving grace has been our honesty and straightforwardness during this transition.

The challenges of my new job situation during this whole period, along with our relationship changes, were at times almost more than I could handle. I recognized the depression and sought help; the helplessness has now abated. And the fact that work has improved with my promotion and recent sales success makes things even better.

I'm finally ready to make an appointment with Doctor Albright so I can begin lowering my dosage and eventually stop taking Zoloft. I feel confident that I now have a definitive answer to the question the doctor asked me last fall: "Yes, we are going to make it!"

- Love, Jim

STRAIGHT STORIES

Man of Many Words

The last two issues of News&Notes featured parts one and two of this series, which follows the progression of Derry Stauffer's Straight Spouse Experience. Here is part three.

There Is A Feeling *Derry Stauffer, April 27, 2000*

There is a feeling
that comes when love goes...
when love walks out
without me.

There is a feeling.
It burns like ice
deep in my center
where I once was full
and now am empty:
hollow, unfilled,
unfillable.

There is a feeling
that comes when love goes...
whenever I am reminded
of what I had,
but have no more.
The panic of facing an empty house,
the sense of absence,
echo in a dark cave.

There is a feeling,
a rushing of superheated blood,
boiling over in my chest,
steaming in my head.
Bursts of stinging bubbles,
rushing, pressing up and out,
in emotional shock waves.

There is a feeling
of dead parts inside
chafing against my heart,
rubbing rawness,
death clawing at life.
Shouldn't I be numb
where I'm dead?

But no... There is a feeling.
At least I am feeling.
Though love has gone
these feelings cry hope!!
for love's rebirth.

Have You Noticed The Roses? *Derry Stauffer, June 2, 2000*

Have you noticed the roses
as you push through the rough?
Have you noticed the roses
while stuck in the thorns?

Remember the beauty
as you work through the pain.
Take note in your leaving
of losses and gain -
of thorns and roses -
remember...to notice the roses.

In the midst of our thorniest thicket
of hurt at every turning,
God places the blooms
to grace our wounds with
budding hope,
crimson passion,
white of the spirit,
variegated joys in sorrow,
and pink for compassion....

Have you noticed the roses?

Beware The Wolf *Derry Stauffer, November 10, 2000*

Beware the wolf of loneliness.
He lurks in dark corners
of happy places,
and pounces!
when your guard is down.

Suddenly his hot breath
stings tears in your
once-laughing eyes.
His paws press hard upon your chest,
burdening your once-lighter heart.

Beware the wolf.
I cannot tell you how.
I feed my wolf on memories
kept in a purse of valued things.
I think he won't consume me,
but, fed this way
he will not leave.

Tell me, friend.
Is there a better way
to beware the wolf of loneliness?

Miracles *Derry Stauffer, August 19, 2000*

Encamped in the high Sierras,
I chanced to scan the star-strewn sky
one last time before sleep.
A meteor blazed a glorious path
from a pine-pointed horizon
to an opposite
mountain-marked end.

Two minutes of timeless grace
burnt orange, and I in awe
stood humbled beneath.

Miraculous, I thought,
that I should witness such,
but what if *all* lives
contain such moments of grace,
made miraculous only by the scarcity
of those who notice?

May I live a life of noticing,
witnessing two-minute miracles
in everyday lives, and
blazing bright their timeless grace.

With This Wing, I Thee Wed

This is Derry's proposal to his new love, Kathy. It was inspired by a week they spent on Otter Lake in Canada when the beautiful loons were gathering on the lake before flying South for the winter. Feathers they found were pasted on it.

Kathy, I can't give you a ring yet,
but these loon feathers symbolize
the kind of commitment I offer to you.

Loons mate for life;
I want to fly into the sunset with you.
I promise you unfailing devotion,
but not dependence,
a bond of loving care,
not binding, but rather a wing.

Wings are for flying,
for climbing higher
than you ever thought possible,
reaching for God, and finding yourself
where God has led you, if you dare,
soaring on the wind of the spirit.
I want to fly with you,
climbing, searching, finding, soaring.

Loons fly in formation as a help for each other.
I want to share our burdens and share our joys,
the peaceful flight of a cloudless day,
and the turbulence too,
when winds of adversity come our way.

I promise you the many voices of a loon:
the haunting, spirit call in quiet moonlight,

and the loony call of
unexpected humor;
the wing-beating, warding call
of protection,
and the ethereal croon
of other worlds' song.

I want to love you,
in breath-holding, deep-diving,
passionate swimming,
and in tender serenity
which feeds us both.

I want to float together
on calm waters,
in quiet communion
with nature,
and each other,
gliding in secret synchrony
toward goals only we can know,
through a life together
that only WE can know.

In play, in work,
in love, in life...
I want to be in it all with you.

Will you marry me?

*Derry Stauffer is a Patent Agent/Entrepreneur
Writer/Engineer/Poet, and Straight Spouse*