

NEWS & NOTES

STRAIGHT SPOUSE *network* NEWSLETTER



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WE HOPE YOU ENJOY THE FIRST 2017 ISSUE OF NEWS & NOTES

In the coming year we will continue to feature significant current issues that impact Straight Spouses, their extended families and the whole of society. Our last issue featured an article on the Transgender phenomenon and the effects and challenges in the families of transgender persons. This is a subject that we continue to explore, increase our understanding of, so we can provide compassionate support to the Straight Spouses of transgender persons.

This issue has a bit of everything: some marked changes in Triage trends, some history on transgender people, same sex marriage, new terminologies, some poetry, and more. ♦

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 unequalled, expansive exposure. 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 sent to you for your approval. Send submissions for consideration, as pdfs or Word documents to our Executive Director, Daphne Callen at SSNDaphneChicago@gmail.com

The Straight Spouse Network Official Newsletter

Relevant information and insights for Straight Spouses, their families, Support Group Facilitators, Support Contacts, Group Participants and Straight Spouse Network supporters. Our goal is to promote understanding and recognition of the Straight Spouse Experience and the important work our organization provides for those affected by it worldwide.

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Letters to the Editor

“Congrats on a very well done newsletter. Very professional. There was a paragraph in the front page article that resonated with me... the one where it’s like the person died but they go on living only now as a totally different person we no longer recognize. That’s how it was for me... virtually overnight.

I’ll never forget how scared I was, smart enough to know this was a big deal and not good for me or the family. That was the early hours after disclosure. At any rate, after 10 years, I’m still processing.

I was glad to see that Amity wrote a piece. Please give my appreciation to the rest of the staff and contributors who worked on the newsletter.”

From longtime member Dave F. in upper Michigan

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STRAIGHT HUSBANDS THE MASCULINITY MYTH



Amity Pierce Buxton

By Amity Pierce Buxton, Founder

Research studies suggest that gay men outnumber lesbians, but a larger proportion of lesbians in heterosexual marriages come out. Even so, more gay husbands disclose. Thus, fewer straight husbands than wives seek help from the Straight Spouse Network, though the number of straight husbands seeking help

from 1991 increased from about one in five to three out of ten.

More important than numbers is the fact that, in emails, groups, and composed responses to research questions, straight husbands express the same emotional turmoil and confusion about self-identity and confidence as do straight wives. In fact, what straight husbands say and do after their wives come out challenges the masculinity myth that says “men don’t cry.” Their testimonies demonstrate that stereotypical problem-solving skills or lack of feelings assigned to men aren’t strategies that resolve disclosure issues or heal the trauma of a wife’s coming out. In reality, straight husbands seek help, express feelings, admit pain, and cry. As one husband emailed, “I cry. I am man.”

Sexuality isn’t the big issue, as outsiders assume, saying, “He must have a ball, having two women.” A man in my support group just last night said tearfully, “My heart is broken.” As he detailed his feelings and need for support, group members listened and shared how they had lessened their pain and sense of helplessness and gained confidence.

May the Straight Spouse Network continue to be a safe place for straight husbands to be themselves and heal - and help destroy the masculinity myth. ♦

Sanctity of Marriage

Denying LGBT people marriage equality does not protect marriage 'between a man and a woman.' That is a myth. The truth is, it dooms millions of unions. The denial of LGBT rights forces people into the closet, and leads millions of them into marriages with unsuspecting straight men and women.

Everyone deserves to be in an honest and authentic marriage. And normally, most people marry with the promise of fidelity. People can't change who they really are. Denying natural human desires can be unbearable, and often leads to adultery. When the truth comes out, hearts are broken and families are shattered.

The impact the Straight Spouse Experience has far reaching effects on all aspects of life in every society worldwide. Medical costs for emotional problems often require therapy and medication, and can actually cause physical problems as well. Many gay husbands on the down-low give their straight spouses STD's, including AIDS. The Courts are tied up with divorce proceedings and child custody hearings. And there are financial repercussions. The huge upheaval can cause people on either side to lose their jobs, lose their assets and even become homeless.

LGBT people need to marry people who are right for them. Protecting LGBT rights protects marriage for everyone. This is the main message the Straight Spouse Network must encourage the world to understand and embrace. So, talk about it loudly, openly and often. ♦

*- Linda Ehle-Callens
Straight Spouse Network Staff*



TRIAGE Counting the Numbers

In the beginning of 2014, our website had an average of 200 hits per day. By November 2015, we were up to an average of 300 per day. By November 2016 we were up to a whopping average of 700 per day. The steady growth was apparent. But our numbers in December 2016 were down to 500 per day. However, during that same month, we had a record number of over 200 requests for support. For a long period our average had been over 160 requests per month. Now things are changing. This February 2017, our average website hits were down to 400 per day. And in that month, we had barely over 100 requests for support.

The Straight Spouse Network staff keeps a watch on these statistics. It is at the top of our agenda at every monthly Staff meeting. At our meeting on February 27, 2017, we recognized this marked drop in numbers.

Several LGBT rights may be challenged: same sex marriage, bans on conversion therapy, gender-mixed basic training and gender-mixed housing on military bases, transgender rights - including medical help, and anti-discrimination laws.

Losing rights could make some LGBT people think twice about coming out of the closet. Statistically, many of those LGBT people who may be reluctant to come out, are married to straight spouses. So, the result may be the creation of more straight spouses. But there is never any way to predict what may happen. Numbers for March are beginning to climb again. We're at an average of 500 website hits per week. Now, more than ever, it's imperative that we enlighten people about the adverse effects of being Straight Spouses. ♦

- Straight Spouse Network Triage Team

THE WORLD TURNS

A HISTORY OF UNDERSTANDING AND SOCIETAL ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSITY

by Linda Ehle-Callens

Gender Neutrality was an integral part of past societies. But over the ages, mankind lost respect for natural things. Rigidity in religion, politics, and development of sophistication in societies changed the way humans looked at our very own nature. Being different became criminal in many European countries. And today, partisan opportunists manipulate the ignorant to gain power.

As an advanced and more informed civilization, we are beginning to come full circle in rediscovering the many natural facets/variances in human sexual nature. But there are still factions who fear what they cannot understand and partisan opportunists who will manipulate that ignorance to gain power. Despite political obstacles, the antiquated Euro centric two-sex society is an ideal which is eroding, giving way to enlightenment and freedom.

The **BUGIS** people of Southern Celebes first arrived in Malaysia in the 16th century. Unlike the two-gender norm in Western society, the Indonesian Bugis recognize five genders: Oroané, Makkunrai, Calalai, Calabai, and Bissu. Bissu are androgynous, and some are gender transcendent, or intersexed. They incorporate all five genders into a single



Bissu

body. Bissu are highly respected and are considered to be spiritual beings. They are often shamans, bomohs, or imams in the mosque.

TWO-SPIRIT Indigenous North American's origins go back at least 15,000 years. Tribal nations use the term Two-Spirit to describe gay, lesbian, bisexual and gender-variant individuals, who were revered, and considered highly spiritual. They played a fundamental role in tribal life, including caring for children and fulfilling other domestic tasks. This tradition was lost over time to Euro-American influences. Today, acceptance



Two Spirits

has resurged in over 130 North American tribes, in every region of the continent. Two-Spirit now replaces the 17th and 18th century's distasteful term *berdache*, which the French used to describe younger partners in a male homosexual relationship.

TRANSSEXUALISMUS

In 1896 Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld opened his medical practice in Berlin. He also ran the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, which campaigned for gay rights and tolerance. In his lifetime he produced volumes of research in sexology, wrote books, and built a unique library on same-sex love and eroticism. In 1918 he and Arthur Kronfeld opened the Institute for Sexual Research. Hirschfeld created the term *transsexualismus*, in today's terms, sexual transition. The institute's research library housed an extensive archive, with medical, psychological, and ethnological divisions, and a marriage and sex



Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld

counseling office. Every year about 20,000 people visited and 1,800 had consultations. Poorer visitors were treated there for free. The institute advocated sex education, contraception, treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, women's emancipation, and was a pioneer for civil rights and social acceptance of homosexual and transgender people.



Dr. Hirschfeld and patients

When Hitler gained control of Germany in the 1930s, along with his decimation of the Jews, he targeted homosexuality. The institute for Sexual Research and its libraries were obliterated by the Nazis. In an instant, years of medical research and advancement went up in flames. On June 28, 1934, Hitler conducted a murderous purge of gay men, even among his own ranks. This was followed by stricter laws on homosexuality and the round-up of gay men. Many tens of thousands were sentenced to slave-labour or death camps. And today, many researchers have come to believe that Hitler may have been homosexual himself. ♦

WIDE WORLD OF TERMINOLOGY

Androgyny

is the combination of masculine and feminine characteristics. Other terms in use are Ladyman or Bigendered. Androgyny is expressed in one's gender ambiguity. An androgynous man is usually effeminate looking, and androgynous females have a more masculine persona.

Asexuality

Labelling asexuality as a sexual orientation is a fairly new concept among researchers. Asexuals have little interest in or no sexual attraction to anyone.

Cisgender (CIS)

This new term, which seems to replace "heterosexual", refers to people who have a gender identity that matches the sex that they were born with, who have a gender identity or perform roles in society considered appropriate for their sex. There are two versions of the term: cis male for "male assigned male at birth" or cis female for "female assigned female at birth".

Demisexual

A demisexual is a stragith person who is sexually attracted only to people with whom they have a strong emotional or romantic bond, and a sense of trust. There is some conjecture that demisexuals may temporarily identify as asexual and then decide that they are in fact demisexual They are not into recreational or gratuitous sex.

Gay

A male who is naturally, sexually attracted to other males.

Gender Neutrality

This is an attempt to end discrimination of gender identity by using gender-neutral language. It includes use of nouns that are not gender-specific to refer to roles or professions. This means not using gender specific pronouns such as he, him and his, to refer to people of indeterminate gender. Examples: the words "policeman" and "stewardess" are gender-specific. Instead, "police officer" and "flight attendant" are gender-neutral terms.

Genderqueer (GQ)

or gender-expansive, describes a broad category of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine.

"Queer" means "not heterosexual," and "genderqueer" denotes gender identity. The terms "gender-nonconforming, bi-gender, non-binary, or just being fluid" are also considered acceptable for non-heterosexuals.

Intersex

These are people who are born with atypical physical sex characteristics, replacing the old term hermaphrodite. Being born with both male and female genitalia confuses initial sex assignment and often leads to involuntary or coerced medical treatment. Early surgery may impose a sexual assignment which would not be the individual's preferred choice later on. About 1 in 1500 to 1 in 2000 are born with these characteristics.

Lesbian

A female who is naturally, sexually attracted to other females.

Pangender

Pangender people identify as all genders and overlap with genderqueer and trigender. They feel an all-encompassing sexual nature. Preferred pronoun terminology usage varies with individuals who identify as pangender. It is impossible to associate with every gender in existence, but pangender persons generally express the desire to include aspects of all genders in their lives.

Transgender

This is the medical condition in which a person whose behavior, appearance, or identity cross, transcend, or do not conform to their biological or assigned sex. Many transgender/transsexual people choose sexual reassignment surgery, preceded by hormone therapy and counselling. In these procedures sexual organs are removed or added to change a person's body into that of the opposite sex. Some individuals are Dual gender: presenting themselves as one or the other sex alternately.

Trigender

This is a general category which includes genderqueer or androgyny; identity that goes beyond the normal binary gender system (male and female) and tends to be a catch-all place for other gender identities.

SOUVENIRS

Like a lot of straight spouses, after my gay husband left me I was a wreck. I didn't want to take meds. I'd quit drinking because I had a lot of decisions to make; wanted to be clear headed. My shrink wasn't helping. Then one day I found an exercise in a self-help book. I decided I'd try it out. As instructed, I browsed through my bungalow and looked at the things that give me pleasure. I focused on my modest antiques, my late brother's art, the mandolin I'd found in my grandmother's basement in San Francisco when I was a child, statues my father made. Those old treasures brought back pleasant memories. And slowly my mood lifted.

When my husband and I split, we divided things up rather hastily, so there are things I gave up or simply missed during the process. Once in a while I'll remember something I once

...in creating a new life, we shouldn't have to negate our past.

treasured and wonder whatever became of it. Straight spouses face immense

changes in life. But in creating a new life, we should not have to negate our past. In time, we should be able to say, "That was my life then, it was real and I don't regret it." Souvenirs from your past can still have special meaning.

If your journey ends in divorce, the process of physical separation can be harsh. You may have the urge to simply rid yourself of objects associated with your marriage. But hold on. Certain heirlooms should be passed down to your children. People throw perfectly good diamond rings into lakes. Some want to burn their wedding dresses. It takes a lot of time and expertise to create those dresses. I know; I recently made one for my daughter. It would be kind of insulting to someone who did all that work to just set it ablaze. If you really can't stand having it around, donate it to Goodwill and take the donation tax-deduction for it. Or sell it for as much as you can get.

One of our wedding gifts was a footed, silver Silent Butler. Somehow I didn't end up with it. One night I was at my daughter's house for Sunday

dinner. My ex-husband, 'Jay', and his boyfriend were there. I asked my Jay about the Silent Butler and his boyfriend exclaimed, "Oh, I just love that so much!" And Jay said, "Oh, yes, he just loves to polish it all the time." I was speechless. I know it's just a 'thing', but I was very fond of it and I wanted my daughter to have it one day. So when you're dividing things up, choose slowly and wisely. Otherwise, your ex-mate's next honey could end up claiming some of your favorite wedding gifts.

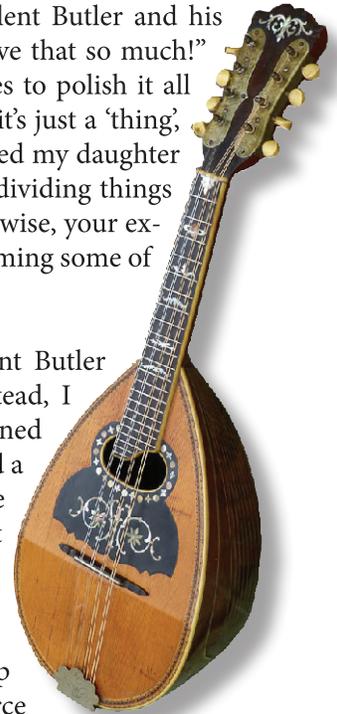
I was hoping I might get the Silent Butler back, as a Christmas gift. But instead, I got a shopping bag filled with canned goods, candy, a package of pasta and a big bag of walnuts. In the 34 years we were together, I never once bought or ate walnuts. But I used the Silent Butler all the time.

A woman in my support group recently told me she'd gone to a divorce meet-up group. The therapist there told her she shouldn't go to any more Straight Spouse support group meetings until her divorce was final. Hello? We need the support of other straight spouses, especially during the legal process.

When I was 18, my parents split up. My dad moved away and mom filed for divorce. She didn't talk about any of it with us kids. So, I knew nothing about what I was in for when I was served with divorce papers. But I've learned plenty at Straight Spouse support group meetings since then.

Many of us have been through the divorce process, are in different stages of it, or still deciding whether or not it's what we want.

We can educate, caution and comfort one another like no other group can. I just wish I'd found my group before I gave up so many nice souvenirs. ♦
- L.E.C.



MAN OF MANY WORDS

When his 30 year marriage ended, Derry Stauffer also started a 2nd career, his wife and youngest child moved away, he turned 50, had a second grandson, and, oh yeah... his cat died. But SSN was an incredible help to him, so much that, 16 years later, he still goes to meetings to give back by helping others. And he found solace in writing poetry. The last issue of News&Notes featured part one, and this is part two of a four part series, which follows the progression of his Straight Spouse Experience.

Breathe Gently On Me *Derry Stauffer, March 19, 2000*

Oh Lord!
My heart is heavy with tears.
Breathe gently on me, oh Spirit.
Breathe gently on my swollen heart,
on my tear-drenched soul.
Dry my tears
with your gentle, caressing breath.

Soothe my hurt.
Massage my aching soul
with compassionate fingers of healing touch.
Your touch which stops bleeding –
staunch my draining heart.
Your touch which restores sight to the blind –

renew my vision of a non-blinding future,
a future with love, and joy, and peace.

Speak to my inner demons
of doubt, and fear.
Drive them out!
And fill those empty places with
knowledge – certainty! – of your love.

Let me feel your love, Lord,
so I am not depending on any person
for the fruits of love:
peace, hope, joy, security, happiness...
even laughter.

Who Stole My Future? *Derry Stauffer, March 23, 2000*

God! Who stole my future?
Tell me so I know who to be angry at!
What happened to my future?
I did all the right things to earn it,
but now it's gone!
And, what is worse:
my past isn't quite what I thought it was either!

Well, it's been wonderful, anyway.
Almost-perfect
is still much better than average.
At least we had that.
And God knows,
I may still get that future I envisioned,
only with someone else.
Someone who can fill in that vital
missing part of a perfect love.

I thought we had the perfect love.
I was proud.
I was confident of the future that this
perfect love would buy,
but now it's gone.
My love may have been perfect,
but not hers.
She just couldn't keep up her part of
"the perfect love."
She isn't wired that way.

Maybe that almost-perfect past
is the only past
which leads to the future I envisioned –
a future not stolen,
but traded for a better future
which I couldn't see from my past:
an oasis,
substituted for a mirage.

In a Grieving Place

Derry Stauffer, March 30, 2000

I'm in a grieving place,
a present where all the rays of past are focused,
seeming to end at one point
of intense, white hot feeling.
I sit facing my past
that rushes headlong into my present,
ending where I sit on a stool called misery.

I gaze upon past rays of shared moments:
of fun and laughter, amplified by you,
of work, made easier because it was for us,
of hardships' load, made lighter by you,
of nature's glory, reflected in your eyes,
of moments of soul stirring intimacy,
of parenting and family, the wider "us"...
all these rays, and more,
a past which draws to a focus on me in my present.
A source of warmth
but I sit too long a-stooled
and the intensity burns my soul.

My heart is on fire.
My mind melts at the focus of the rays
at the end of the past,
if I sit too long a-stooled on misery.

Move, I must. I cannot sit this way.
I must stand on the knowledge
that rays don't end unless blocked.
The rays of my past have a momentum of purpose.
If I face forward
I can see just beyond the focus of now.
I can glimpse the edge of tomorrow
where the rays move out of this hot focus,
and spread ever outward
into a new future.

I cannot see that tomorrow
without walking out of my now,
with my back held warm
by the rays of my past,
ever focused on me.

I do not lose my past
by walking into my future.
Each ray has its own direction
and I will choose to follow
those whose past I cherish
for the warmth they give me now,
and the hope they promise for tomorrow.

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