

touchstone, but his entry into it brought a special gift to me; it irrevocably changed what had been a debilitating five-year focus. I stopped seeing him as a gay man who also happens to be my son, and saw him as my son, who also happens to be a gay man.

With that shift, my own coming out as the mother of a gay son began. With his permission, I tried the information out on a few carefully selected friends. Their reaction of surprise (or in a few cases, no surprise), reflected love and concern and no judgment. Reassured by the positive experience of these initial forays, and encouraged but never pushed by my son, I slowly expanded my range. Sitting in a small audience of college students at a panel discussion of gay, lesbian and bisexual issues, I publicly, for the first time, identified myself as the mother of a gay son, willing to be a resource to any parent or child whenever or however needed. My involvement since then in activities sponsored by and on behalf of the gay community increases. I've worked on committees, spoken as a panelist and served as a workshop leader. I can write and sign this piece with my name. How far I have come from where I was eleven years ago!

Questions naturally occurring around sexual practice and emotional intimacy are there, and where they involve our mutual concern about AIDS, they are openly addressed. Other than that, they are a personal matter and we respect that implicit boundary. There has been one exception. Working toward an advanced degree, I wrote a major paper which involved research on homosexuality. My son gave me the journals he wrote during his coming out process to use as a primary source. How far, indeed, we have come.

How do I feel now? Blessed and grateful. Blessed by the gift of having this

honest, courageous, wise, and above all, loving person in my life as my son; blessed by the circumstance that brings me, welcome, into the circle of his community; blessed by the mutual respect and trust that brings him and his partner, welcome, into mine; blessed by the process which has brought into my life both gay and lesbian friends whom I cherish. And grateful. Grateful to be at a point where I don't have to deny who my son is, where no guilt or shame mars my appreciation for him as a perfect human being, where I rejoice in his uniqueness. And grateful to be at a point where I can offer support to others — gay child or parent — on their own journeys.

One thing hasn't changed. I'm still afraid. I'm afraid for the safety of my son, and I'm afraid for a world that does not honor difference. If my story can help change that, then I want it told.

Meanwhile, I'm looking forward to the next parade, because I'm going to carry my own sign, and I know what it will say. "My son's gay and WE'RE OK!"

A Son's Story

Grey Todd

Dear Mom,

I feel like we have come a long way together in the last ten years or so, and yet I haven't really ever told you how grateful I am for your company and counsel during that time. I have had the great luck of having a mother who has grown herself to be open-minded, and who is willing to learn as well as teach. You are a beautiful human being, Mom, and I have decided to take this opportunity to let you know some of the many reasons why I know this to be true. This is a long-overdue Thank You note.

On that night in June of 1981 when I sat with you in the living room and told you I was gay, thank you for telling me you would always love me, no matter what. That was the most important thing you could have said. And thanks, in the middle of what was surely an overload of emotional chaos, for remaining calm and asking questions and expressing your concern for my happiness and well-being.

In the same light, thank you for not covering your ears and/or telling me you didn't want to hear about it, and for not throwing me out of the house, or telling me to go see a doctor or priest to save me from burning in hell. Thank you also for the next morning, when you didn't look at me differently.

Thank you for taking initiative by reading books like *Now That You Know*, attending support group meetings and for watching all those Movies of the Week.

Thanks for taking Phil, Oprah and Sally Jessy Raphael with a large grain of salt.

Thank you for going to hear speakers and participating in seminars, and for clipping articles and sending me Xeroxes.

Thank you for being the kind of mother who can say "gay" out loud and not make a face, and for making yourself available to talk about my lifestyle without judging it.

Thank you for asking me about my boy-friends and...yes, even for offering opinions about them.

Thank you for the birthday card in which you wrote, "This was one of the best days of my life."

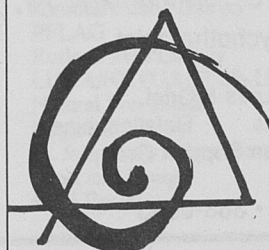
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