

Growing Through the Pain

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My son, a homosexual? I felt overwhelmed with guilt and shame and determined to "fix" him at any cost.

My face flushed with embarrassment, but I kept my voice calm. "Tony, I want to know where you are. When you don't come home, I've got to know who to call."

We argued for several minutes, then he dropped the bombshell. "Well, you know I'm gay, don't you?" My mind froze. Tony began filling the awkward silence with horrifying details. Three months before, he'd been hitchhiking home when a school counselor had picked him up and seduced him. Now he accepted his "new" identity and was getting to know other homosexuals. "And, mom, he concluded, "I've found the man of my dreams. Everything's going to be all right now!"

In the days following, I was haunted by every mistake I'd ever made as a mother. I thought back to the beginning, when I'd eloped at age 18 with my boyfriend. Actually, we never got around to making our marriage official, and then I got pregnant. When I moved home with my parents a short time later, everyone assumed I was now divorced. I hid the fact I was actually an unwed expectant mother. After Tony's birth in the county hospital, I drifted back into the wrong crowd. Soon I was experimenting with drugs like marijuana and LSD. The next few years were terribly lonely.

I maintained my social life by working a deal with my little brother: I gave him drugs; he looked after Tony while I went out and partied. Then my brother became a Christian, and turned into a radical "Jesus freak." My mother was worried sick about him, but his life gave me a secret hope: if he can change, maybe I can, too.

One night I went with my brother to a Bible study. Surprisingly, I noticed something different in the people there. I didn't know exactly what it was, but I knew that I wanted it. I went home and told God that I would follow Him for three months. If it didn't work, I would go back to my old ways. In the following weeks, I sensed a new power in my life to make right choices. I quit drugs and avoided party music on the radio, which reminded me of evenings spent at the cocktail lounges.

Then Tony and I joined a Christian discipleship ministry - a very supportive environment for a single mother. I prayed every night that God would be a husband to me and a father to my son. Others held me up as the perfect example of single parenthood.

But after several years of ministry, I began feeling "burned out." I would go to work, come home, sit in front of the TV, and drag myself to church on Sunday mornings.

Then God allowed some difficult circumstances to enter my life, and I started drawing close to the Lord again, praying and reading my Bible. As my spiritual eyes opened again, however, I saw that my relationship with my son was not good. We had grown apart. Tony had acquired a lot of new friends I didn't know.

Soon afterward, I was devastated by Tony's confession of homosexual involvement. "I don't understand this," I told him that day, "but I love you and we'll work it out." I had no wisdom at all on how to deal with the situation. I only knew one thing: I would do anything to stop that man from putting his arms around my son ever again.

Then I came up with the perfect solution: We'd kidnap Tony! I phoned one of my brothers, who arranged to fly Tony to another brother's home in central Oregon. The next day, we loaded all his things into a car and drove him to the airport. Before Tony knew what hit him, he was on his way north.

I thought the whole problem was solved. Tony was now 1,100 miles away from his gay friends in California-perfect! My brother promised to look after Tony until I could join them.

I was immensely relieved, especially after my brother's phone call the next day. "Tony has gone to a church," he reported. "Everything is going to be OK." The day after, he called again. "Anita, I've got bad news. You know that church Tony is attending? Well, it's a gay church." I felt sick. This situation was going to be more difficult to fix than I thought.

Immediately I gave my notice at work. I think they were relieved when I finally left; for two weeks, I cried continually and walked around in a fog. I was overwhelmed with guilt. This might never have happened if you'd gotten married, I lectured myself. My handsome son had always been the pride of my life; now I was so ashamed of him. I was certain no other Christian mother had ever found herself in my situation.

Back in Oregon, I joined my old church. I went for counseling, but all the counselor could do was read the Scriptures on homosexuality. He meant well, but hearing about men lusting after one another was not what I needed.

After six months of turmoil, I heard about Love In Action, an ministry in California to people coming out of homosexuality. Something heavy lifted off my shoulders as I read testimonies of men and women who had been set free. Finally I had hope-both for me and my son.

Life returned to my weary spirit. Now I wanted to help everybody. I especially wanted to reach out to other mothers in my situation. The Lord led me to a local Christian counselor who agreed to be my spiritual covering in ministry. Soon, we launched a parents' support group.

Things were much improved for me. I could honestly say, "Because of what happened to my son, I am a better person." My walk with the Lord was much stronger. "Wishy-washy" wouldn't do anymore; I had to cling to Him.

About this time, I faced some difficult questions: If Tony is still gay ten years from now, where will I be? Am I going to base my whole life on waiting for the day he turns around? No, I had to go on. I had a life outside of Tony; my life was centered in Christ.

In 1983, I moved down to southern California to help my mom adjust to retirement. Then I got to know Frank Worthen, the founder of Love in Action. Our friendship quickly deepened, and eventually we were married in November 1984.

Since then, God has continued to unfold exciting things in my life. After I worked in the Love in Action office for six years, God directed Frank and I to move to Manila. In January 1991, we launched Bagong Pag Asa ("New Hope"), a ministry to homosexuals in the Philippines. After three years, we returned to the San Francisco area and began New Hope Ministries (Love In Action relocated to Memphis, Tenn.).

"What has happened to Tony?", many parents ask me. My son is still in the homosexual lifestyle. And he is facing the consequences of HIV infection. However, we have a good relationship and I believe that, one day, Tony will see the emptiness of his lifestyle and turn to God. I also know I can't make that happen, so I leave him in the care of One who loves him even more than I do.

Of course, my son and Frank understand each other very well. (Frank lived an exclusively homosexual life for 25 years before leaving that behavior in 1973.) And Tony teases me: "Mom, if it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't be married!"

The experiences of my life have sometimes been very painful, but they have caused me to grow, and have given me a special sensitivity to others who are hurting. Only the Lord could take such deep trials and turn them into blessings. I thank Him every day for what He has done.