Can You Afford to Be Unforgiving?

Remembering our friends
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KENYA: Rena Otieno,
CANADA: Itamar Matos de Souza,
BRAZIL: Adam Lee,
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WHO WE ARE...
Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. is a nonprofit support organization. We minister to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of current and former Seventh-day Adventists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals and their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBTI Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is a global organization which supports the advancement of human rights for all people worldwide.

Founded in 1976 the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in the United States. Kinship has a board made up of thirteen officers. There are also regional and population coordinators in specific areas. The current list of members and friends includes approximately 1,550 people in more than forty-three countries.

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn or even mention homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts that are used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God’s children who grow up as LGBTI has its roots in the misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

SUPPORT KINSHIP
Seventh-day Adventist Kinship operates primarily on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBTI Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below or donate securely online at sdakinship.org. (You can also donate using your Visa or MasterCard by contacting treasurer@sdakinship.org. You will be phoned so that you can give your credit card information in a safe manner.)

KINSHIP
PO Box 69, Tillamook, OR 97141, USA
or visit Kinship’s website at: www.sdakinship.org.
From the Editor

I’ve been thinking a lot about Goshen these days. I am not ruminating about Goshen, Massachusetts, sitting delicately on one of the hills introducing us to the Berkshire Mountains; nor the school district in New York or the town just south of Benton Harbor, near Elkhart, Indiana. I am thinking of the original Goshen, tucked into the green pastures of the Nile Valley; a sanctuary for Semitic shepherds and neighbor to a series of the most famous plagues of the ancient world.

It's not that Goshen escaped all the plagues. They had to put up with the bloody Nile, teeming frogs, dusty gnats, and swarming flies. From what I read of the Biblical text their infestation stopped there. Hebrew livestock survived. Hebrew skin did not have to recover from boils. Hebrew land appears to have avoided hail that was "the worst storm since Egypt became a nation." Hebrew grains do not seem to have been touched by locusts. Hebrew firstborn children survived. (Any of you who read this differently than I are most welcome to write and tell me.) In the midst of unthinkable calamity Goshen became a place of safely and light. I think there are some lessons there for us.

Few of us have lived our lives without some “plagues.” We have experienced the normal vicissitudes of difficult parents, frustrating education, moves that take us away from our friends, deaths that steal people close to our heart. Many of us have also endured the plague of injustice, bigotry, hazing, harassment, job or housing loss - all because we have a race or orientation not accepted by our family or community, or because we are allies of marginalized people.

I think it is these very experiences that allow us to understand the value of a Goshen, a place of safety and light, and give us the opportunity to build the skills to create Goshens for others. We need to learn to be just when it is not easy, fair as we cry out against bigotry, gentle when dealing with wounded souls, honest when it would be easy to dissemble, and welcoming even to those we may not understand. We need to strengthen our courage and patience. Every single one of us knows people who need a Goshen. Every single one of us has the opportunity to make the space around us a safe place. I think our experiences call out for us to do so. And here is the last lesson: if we are to create safe zones for others we need to build them for ourselves. And this is why I always say, take good care of yourself, for you are infinitely valuable.

Catherine

Editor’s note:
December was a particularly busy month for Kinship. We got many articles that we want you to have a chance to read. Some of them did not make it into the last issue. We’re glad you can have access to them now.

Kampmeeting 2013
Save the Date!

The U.S. Kinship Kampmeeting 2013 is scheduled for July 2-7, 2013, at the Asilomar Conference Center in Pacific Grove, California. You won't want to miss the opportunity to vacation and fellowship on the beautiful Pacific Coast, so start planning now by blocking this week off on your 2013 calendar.

Kampmeeting is a time for Kinship members to celebrate and embrace other members from a broad range of spiritual and social experiences. If you haven’t yet attended a Kampmeeting, 2013 will be a good year to discover Kinship through our biggest annual event. If you have been to a Kampmeeting in the past, you already know what a diverse and fulfilling experience Kampmeeting can be—music, friends, family, networking, sharing, absorbing, laughter, fun, learning, growing, celebrating, and oh, did I mention music! —it’s all found at Kampmeeting!

Watch for pricing and travel information. And remember, Women and Children First weekend will precede Kampmeeting.

Fred Casey and Twid Widmer, Co-coordinators

It's never the end of the world.
It's already tomorrow in Australia.

Charles M. Schultz
Each year since 1988, December 1 has been observed as World AIDS Day. As an organization, SDA Kinship did not host events, but several individual members spent some time that day and through the month sharing links and reflections on HIV and AIDS, remembering friends who had passed away from AIDS-related illnesses, or explaining what being sero-positive has meant for their lives. Here are some stories from these members.

"I shook United States Air Force Sergeant Leonard Matlovich’s hand at the MCC in Washington DC in the late 1970s. He was the first openly gay person to appear on the cover of a major news magazine. He died of AIDS during the height of the epidemic in 1986 at the age of 44 as so many of our early heroes did and so many of our early Kinship members. I cried for ten years from 1982-1992 watching 350 young men I knew leave this world."

— R. Londis

Sgt. Matlovich served in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War and fought to stay in the military after he came out as gay in 1974. He was discharged the following year despite having a flawless service record. Matlovich’s tombstone in the Congressional Cemetery, Washington DC, doesn’t include his name but does bear the inscription: "When I was in the military, they gave me a medal for killing two men, and a discharge for loving one." The tombstone is a memorial for all LGBT veterans.

"I am in a deep, reflective mood because I am thinking about the 106 young men that I personally knew who died of AIDS from 1983-1996."

"The picture is my friend Rolf. He was the first Seventh-day Adventist person in Victoria, Australia, to die of AIDS in 1984. Rolf was a beautiful person all-round: intelligent, he had been a chef in the Australian Navy, had a great tenor voice, and was very kind to people. He had a magnetic personality, was a body builder, played football, was always a smart, fashionable dresser... He had many, many girlfriends. They felt at ease with him because there were no sexual expectations."

"Seventh-day Adventist pastors preached, when Rolf was dying, that God sent AIDS to wipe out gay men, like He did with Sodom and Gomorrah. All the Seventh-day Adventist Church members must have believed these lies and accepted these prejudices, because nobody stood up to advocate for Rolf and his family—not one Adventist Christian... Only one other disfellowshipped gay Adventist man and his friends cared..."
for Rolf tenderly, lovingly, as Christ would have. The early Kinship members all became AIDS buddies because we all knew darn well that no love or support could be expected from the Church at the time. Rolf died peacefully, aged 24.

“The gay community drew together, an amazing army of love and practical help, and in total solidarity we were fighting for our very survival. For 20 years, we acted up, fought for affordable drugs, top quality medical treatment, made lists of gay-friendly doctors and hospitals, organised the AIDS buddy system, and even had bakeries and kitchens to ensure only the best for people living with AIDS. Christ would have been very proud of the gay community then. He would most definitely have been extremely ashamed of His remnant church.

“I had just returned from the 1983 SDA Kinship Kampmeeting in San Diego County, California. It was at that Kampmeeting that I first heard of the dreaded “gay disease” (it had no name yet) and the notion of practicing safe sex. This might have saved my life.

“Things have changed a lot in the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the decades, thanks to all the work done by Kinship in advocating, teaching, and lisising; making a presence; and rattling the gates! Kinship leaders have forged many allies. An example of this is the magnificent movie Seventh-Gay Adventists. Facebook and social media are powerful tools of communication, and I love the Kinship virtual community. Thank you, thank you, Kinship. I love you all unconditionally.”

—K. Paulusse

Some members also remembered ministers who’d grieved with them during that period:

“That kind of rejection prompted Pastor Rudy Torres and others to act differently, to act with compassion, to defy the expected norms at the time. Pastor Torres also attended Kampmeeting in 1984 and it was a ‘wow’ experience on so many levels. We taped his sessions and others at that Kampmeeting...(cassette tapes, which I still have) and the messages were for their time, but still so relevant. He was hurting also. So many deaths and we did not know how to mourn the devastation. It was hard then, and still difficult today to think of our lost.”

—O. Vasquez

“Pastor Torres was the minister at my church, Garden Grove...and every week he preached grace. More importantly, he lives grace, calling the church to live in grace. He has stood against the church leadership, because he saw each person, gay or straight, as a child of God, adopted thru Christ for love and compassion. I’m so grateful to have learned from him. I’m new to Kinship and appreciate you sharing about our history in the ’80s and ’90s. We must not forget...”

—S.S.

World AIDS Day 2012 was observed under the slogan “Getting to zero: zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination, zero AIDS related deaths.” This is a high-stretch target because there is still no vaccine for this disease. In 2011, 2.5 million people worldwide were newly infected with HIV, and 34.2 million people were living with the virus, including about 2.5 million children younger than 15 years old. In the United States, men who sleep with men represent 61% of new infections, and more Black women are affected by HIV and AIDS than any other demographic. Around the world, heterosexual women are most likely to contract the virus. Despite these sobering figures, there have been reports this year of “promising results” from ongoing vaccination trials. We keep up the hope for a medical solution, and in the meantime support each other in other ways.

“Yesterday at a potluck at an HIV housing project, some were sitting around talking to some of the new residents. Two were telling others what the housing project looked like 15 years ago compared to how nice it is now. Then they began naming names, like one does at a high school reunion, of those who they knew that had died. It was kind of sad. Some of the ones who died I have known over the past six years of association through the Episcopal Church. The housing project is one of the church’s community service projects.”

—S. Marlow

As Kinship’s Communications Director, Ashish David pointed out that the Adventist Disaster Relief Agency (ADRA) also commemorates World AIDS Day each year and hosts some informational resources on its website, including a poster, a video, and bulletin inserts. Every opportunity to raise awareness and help to support people affected by HIV or AIDS is valuable. We’re all family, regardless of our status.

As ADRA’s recommended pulpit announcement for December 1 said, even if we are not doctors ourselves, there is plenty that any of us can do to help:

“Together, we can bring awareness by communicating the risks, educating those around us on prevention, and bringing an end to this deadly disease. I pray that you will start today.”

—ADRA

If you are a Kinship member and missed these and other conversations in December, send an email to info@sdakinquaship.org and ask to join the members-only Kinship Facebook group.

Can You Afford to Be Unforgiving?
©Arlene R. Taylor PhD

One of the secret causes of stress plaguing millions of people is unforgiveness. —Don Colbert, M.D.

The woman made her way slowly and painfully across my office and into a chair. Her name was Jaylee. Attractive, in her early forties, mahogany hair pulled back in a low ponytail, obviously in great discomfort. As she began her story, silent tears coursed down her face and fell onto hands clasped tightly in her lap, hands that were beginning to show signs of arthritic disfigurement.

Several years before, Jaylee had returned home early from a meeting to discover her husband in bed with the babysitter. “I’ve tried to get over it,” she said. “We got a new bed and redecorated the room. We went to counseling. I’ve tried everything, I really have, but nothing has worked. Every time I look at him all I can see in my mind’s eye is the two of them in our bed amidst rumpled sheets. And to add insult to injury, a few weeks ago my doctor told me I had an autoimmune disease. I’m always in pain. Everything about my body aches.”

“Have you tried changing the picture in your mind’s eye?” I asked. “Every time that old picture pops up, have you purposefully envisioned a new replacement picture?”

She shook her head. “That psychological stuff doesn’t work with me.”

I smiled. “It’s brain-function stuff.”

She rolled her eyes and continued. “As I said, I have tried everything, but nothing has helped. Finally I told him to move out.”

“And how is that working?” I asked. Silence and more tears.

“It appears that you are still sad,” I said. “It’s been five years since the incident. What are you still sad about?”

In a nanosecond her entire demeanor changed. Her black eyes blazed fire and indignation. “What do you think I’m sad about?” she shouted. “Are you a complete moron? He ruined my life. That’s what I’m sad about!”

It also appeared that sadness was the least of it. For several minutes the woman raged about the injustice of life. After all, she had been a good wife and mother and didn’t deserve this. Repeat did not deserve this. Finally she wound down, took a deep breath, and sighed.

“Have you tried forgiving him?” I asked.

Shaking her head, Jaylee replied, “He asked me many times to forgive him but it was all just too egregious. Now it’s too late. He remarried last month. Besides, why should I forgive him? He doesn’t deserve to be forgiven.”

“None of us deserves to be forgiven for our faux pas,” I said.

“Faux pas!” Jaylee fairly screamed. “Are you kidding me? What he did was absolutely unforgivable. It ruined my life. Faux pas indeed!”

I squelched a smile. My French heritage had bubbled up before I’d had time to consider that blunder would have been a more fortunate word choice. “You could still forgive him,” I said. “It’s never too late. The person could have died, and you could still forgive.”

Some definitions for forgiveness focus on reducing unforgiveness. Many acts have the potential to reduce unforgiveness and are thus often confused with forgiveness. As one researcher put it, successful vengeance will eliminate unforgiveness, but no one would confuse vengeance with forgiveness.

“Forgiveness does not mean that you deny the other’s responsibility for injuring or hurting you, condone bad behavior, minimize and justify the wrong, or excuse the act,” I explained. “And it certainly doesn’t mean that you choose to reconcile or remain in an abusive relationship or environment or that you waive your right to justice and appropriate compensation.” Jaylee sat motionless, glowering at me.
I explained that at least two types of forgiveness pop up in the literature: decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness.

- Decisional forgiveness is a behavioral intention to resist an unforgiving stance and to respond differently toward a transgressor.
- Emotional forgiveness is the replacement of negative unforgiving emotions with positive other-oriented emotions. Emotional forgiveness, which involves psychophysiological changes, has more direct health and well-being consequences.

Jaylee could begin with decisional forgiveness and, hopefully, move on to emotional forgiveness. “The bottom line,” I said, “is that forgiveness and forgiving appear to be crucial to healthy living.” As Doctors Arnold and Barry Fox put it, when you say “I forgive you,” you’re also saying “I want to be healthy.” The act of forgiving allows the body to turn down the manufacture of catabolic chemicals, and instructs the subconscious to banish negative feelings from the mind. “Forgiveness has less to do with others,” I said, “and everything to do with the forgiver. In this case, that would be you.”

Silence.

“Think of it this way,” I continued. “Forgiveness is a gift you give to yourself, a way to stop harboring destructive feelings that sap health and happiness. A way of helping yourself to feel better. Forgiveness can improve your health. If you choose not to forgive, you will likely be the one who pays most dearly. I once heard it put this way: A person living in unforgiveness, all the while wishing that the other person would die, is the one actually drinking the deadly poison. I know that you’re accustomed to holding a grudge, but there is another way.”

According to internationally renowned cardiologist Herbert Benson, there is something called the physiology of forgiveness. Being unable to forgive another person’s faults is harmful to your health. As recently as a few years ago, it would have been difficult to find much information on the physiology of forgiveness. Few people realized that forgiveness research even existed. Although the field is admittedly new, it has grown exponentially over the past decade with more than 1,200 published studies (up from 58 as recently as 1997).

Studies have shown that there is not just a psychology underlying forgiveness but a physiology as well. An inability or unwillingness to forgive has been linked with a variety of health hazards and negative consequences, including the following:

- Increased stress levels and muscle tension
- Increased blood pressure and heart rate
- Increased levels of adrenaline and cortisol
- Suppressed immune function
- Increased risk for depression, heart disease, stroke, and cancer
- Decreased neurological function and memory
- Impaired relationships at home and at work

On the flip side, studies have revealed the power of forgiveness which can include these benefits:

- Healthier relationships
- Greater mental, physical, spiritual health
- Less anxiety, stress, and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- Lower risk of alcohol/substance abuse
- Making room for compassion, kindness, and peace

Unforgiveness may underlie many of the problems individuals grapple with in life. According to one cleric, his belief at time of ordination was that about half of all problems were due (at least in part) to unforgiveness. Ten years later, he estimated that at least three quarters of all health, marital, family, and financial problems stem from unforgiveness. After more than twenty years in ministry, he concluded that over 90 percent of all problems are rooted in issues related to unforgiveness.

“I n fact,” I explained, “it appears that the one who forgives tends to benefit more than the one who is forgiven. Who knew?”

Jaylee would have none of it. Rising from the chair, she painfully made her way toward the door. “I’ll think about it and let you know,” were her parting words.

Several days passed. The weekend came and went and was followed by another. Then one morning the call light on my office phone was blinking. Picking up the receiver I dialed into voicemail. The words “I’ve decided” came to my ear. “And I won’t do it,” the voice said. “I’ve decided I’ll die first!”

I replaced the receiver, regretfully. Jaylee probably would die first—a devastation that might have been avoided.

Do you need to forgive yourself for something? Is there anybody in your life you need to forgive? How healthy do you want to be?

Forgiveness is a choice, a gift you give yourself. Choose it today!
Dear friends,

What a year 2012 has been for the Seventh-Gay Adventists film and movement. Not only have you been part of the audiences and incredible conversations, but your grassroots support is what’s made this all possible. Thank you for believing in this project and this vision as we continue to do screenings and move into the DVD production phase so you all can share the film in your communities. Here are just a few highlights of this year as we pause to appreciate what 2012 has been:

This year there have been 42 screenings at festivals, churches, theaters, and community spaces all over the U.S. (and a few internationally as well) with over 8,000 people in attendance. And we just got word of another film festival acceptance (this one in Melbourne in March).

Almost every screening has been beyond capacity with a wait list, which just underscores what an appetite there is to have this conversation about faith, identity, belonging, and what it means to be in a church family together. As a comment on our Facebook page recently said, “A beautiful, hopeful film. This is a present opportunity to have a meaningful discussion about what it means to love each other in the Adventist denomination of Christianity.”

Overwhelmingly positive feedback to the screening and conversation from a smaller crowd of 100 in Keene to a huge crowd of 1,000 and a standing ovation at the La Sierra University Church where we all learned more about the sacred act of listening. Check out a selection of endorsements and feedback on our new endorsements page (http://www.sgamovie.com/endorsements).

The Babcocks, who are featured in the film and were mugged (at gunpoint) after our two Benton Harbor screenings near Andrews University. Their grace and witness under extreme pressure is an absolute testimony to the people they are! (See their account of the evening on the next pages.)

Dad after story from you all about the continuing impact of the film and starting this conversation in your community and family. A few favorites include:

- The woman who said her mom changed her mind and came to her wedding after seeing the film.
- The man who said he went to a Christmas concert with his family at church for the first time in years after seeing the film because seeing the film helped him believe that he could be a person of faith still.
- The LGBT students and allies group on the Andrews campus who hosted their own (well-attended) discussion after a hugely successful local screening to talk about how they are navigating this intersection of faith and identity in their lives.
- The professor at a major Adventist university who said the day after our screening in the area that she had to scrap her lesson plans for the day because all of her students just wanted to discuss the film.
- The woman who said her mother, a “die-hard” Adventist who had a lot of trouble with her son coming out but who came to a screening and talked about the film all the way home. In her words, “It was a huge gift to our family.”
- The gay man, known in his community for his thoughtful activism around this topic, who said he has felt a noticeably positive change in the way he is received in local congregations since we had a large screening in his hometown.
- The young father who drove three hours with his wife and 2-year-old to come to a screening (at his wife’s prompting, he admitted). He spoke up afterwards when a non-Adventist asked if a film like this makes a difference when Adventists see it. He described himself as a very conservative Adventist who has always taken a “love the sinner, but hate the sin” approach. He said that he was walking out of the theater feeling much more open to gays in his church—he really identified with one of the film subjects and wouldn’t want to be a barrier to anyone’s relationship with God or their faith. He thanked us and the film participants for getting him to wrestle with this topic.
- The church leader who has to be a quiet supporter “inside the building” due to his job who said he felt like he knew God better after watching the film.
- The minister who described the film and discussion as “a mighty act of justice” in the church community and pledged to keep the conversation going.
- This is how change happens, bit by bit, story by story. And it’s not about all agreeing with each other or pretending there aren’t still big questions to wrestle with. But it is about more grace, more compas-
sion, more just showing up to listen to each other’s hearts and witness each other’s spiritual journeys.

For those of you looking for a worthy cause to give a year-end tax-deductible contribution to, please know that we still need and appreciate your support both for continued screenings and as we move into the DVD production phase. (http://www.sgamovie.com/donate)

We also want to highlight two other really great causes that could really use your generous support. Please: if everyone on this list just gave these two organizations $5, it would make a tremendous difference!

**SDA Kinship International: Kinship has been supporting and advocating for LGBTI Adventists (current and former) for more than 30 years. They are entirely volunteer run, and offer vital support for Adventists navigating exactly the issues that our film explores. We've found a second family with Kinship (and their "Kampmeetings" are the only Adventist camp meetings that Lily has ever been to). Please do support their work (and all donations are tax-deductible).

**Church 1.0: For those of you who have seen the film, you'll remember that the third act includes the return to ministry by one of the main film subjects after the welcoming church he'd been attending closed. Pastor Marcos has been leading Church 1.0 (the name refers to early Christian churches that were small and not institutionalized) for a year and three months now. They are a small group and could use some "angel investing." ;-) A woman who came to our last screening of the year in NYC commented during the discussion. She talked about how she had contributed to the film early on even though she was a full-time student and didn't have much money. She committed to renting books for a semester to save funds and contributed the rest to the film. Then she added, "I'm sitting here feeling so proud because I helped birth this film. I was part of this."

I hope everyone of you, audience member and contributor alike, know that you have been part of this story in a very profound way. Thank you. It's been a very good year.

We've got more screenings in the new year that we're looking forward to (Seattle on Feb. 9th, Hollywood on Feb. 16th, San Diego on Feb 21st, Glendale on Feb. 23rd, and many more in the works). Watch the screenings page for details. With much gratitude and good wishes for the new year,

Stephen & Daneen

http://www.facebook.com/sgamovie
http://www.sgamovie.com/donate

P.S.

Please do check out the new endorsements page. Here are just a few new favorites:

"This film is a ministering film. Having watched it four times now, at four locations, I am deeply impressed each time by how, rather than creating contention, it creates an atmosphere of concern and a spirit of community in a way very like what we try to foster at our church...In small and large ways, this film, and the sacred listening spaces that have accompanied its viewing, bear tangible witness to the God of the outcast." —Jared Wright, pastor, Azure Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church

"WOW. What a beautiful film! Thanks to those featured in the film for being so vulnerable and real - it took great courage to tell your stories the way you did, and we were humbled and deeply touched by your witness. I can't imagine anyone seeing this and not being profoundly moved by it. And thanks to La Sierra University Church for being brave enough to host this event. It was an awesome, spirit-filled experience!" —Lorelei Cress

"This is a beautiful and compelling film that speaks for many within the Seventh-day Adventist and larger Christian community. It has the potential to do much good, particularly among religious conservatives because of the way it engages with those of devout faith. Although it's set in the context of Seventh-day Adventism, anyone who has felt that their faith and sexuality are in conflict will instantly get this film."

—Sharon Groves, director, religion and faith program, Human Rights Campaign

"The film is just beautiful. My students didn't want to do anything but talk about the film in class today!"

—Adventist university professor (the day after we had a screening in the area filled with local Adventist students and faculty)

"The film is superb--a poignant and profound experience beyond any I've seen on the subject."

—Chris Blake, author and professor of English, Union College

"Thank you for telling our story! I walked out of the screening feeling respect and love in a way I've never experienced before. The space you nurtured and protected could only be created by allies like you. Please keep up the good work! Your work has the potential to save many lives, families, and communities."

—Freddy Lee
On a frosty Michigan night in November, George and I were in Benton Harbor, for the showing of the privately produced film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*, a documentary highlighting the dilemma of gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists who love their church. Our daughter Sherri, whose family is featured in the film, drove up from Ohio for the screening and panel discussion afterward and shared our hotel room. At the theater we found dozens of interested persons, as well as students and faculty from Andrews University, eagerly awaiting the film. So many wanted to see the film that the producers had to schedule a second showing, and due to the after-film discussions the event ended after midnight. We headed out the door, leaving a faculty member, a couple of students, and the husband-and-wife team who had spent over three years producing the compelling film—Stephen Eyer and Deneen Akers.

George had parked our Highlander in a handicapped parking spot directly in front of the theater, and he and Sherri and I hurried to get out of the cold. Just as we started up the car, a young man waving his hand ran toward us from the theater entrance. We stopped, thinking it was one of the Andrews’ students, and George rolled down his window.

“I was here at the movie and my friends drove off and left me,” he said. “Could you give me a ride just to that McDonalds over there? I’m staying at the Motel 6 and can get there from McDonalds.” Pulling his scarf closer about his neck and shivering obviously, he pointed to the golden arches half a mile down the road. When we hesitated he added, “Don’t worry. I’m a good guy. I just need a ride.”

I gave George a questioning look and he shrugged. Then I turned to Sherri in the seat behind me and said, “Do you mind having this guy sitting by you?”

She shook her head. “No, he looks cold, and it’s just a little ways.” So George told him to get in.

We left the lot and had gone only a block when our hitchhiker exclaimed, “Oh, no! My bad! Take a left here. Then a right at the stop sign. I can walk to the motel from there—in front of Meijer.”

Confused, George asked, “Where? Where?”

“Right over there.”

Obediently George drove to the road bordering Meijer’s deserted parking lot. We were all puzzled and alarmed by then. Suddenly the man demanded, “Stop the car. Right here.”

George stopped. Without further ado, our passenger pulled out a pistol, waved it around, and announced, “This is a holdup. I want your money.”

I turned in my seat so I could see him right behind George. “What?” I asked. “What do you want?”

“This is a holdup,” he said again.

Sherri put out her hand and patted his right arm since the gun in his left hand was now drilling into George’s left shoulder which rose above the car seat.
“Oh, no, no, no,” she protested. “You’re not going to do this.”

“This is a real holdup,” he insisted, “and this is a real gun. I need your money. You can get more, but I can’t.”

Sherri kept patting his arm and talking. “I understand that you have a real gun, and we will give you some money. But what’s really going on in your life that you have to go to this extent to get some money?”

This holdup wasn’t going at all as the young man had planned. We didn’t seem scared, we seemed to want to help him, and this young woman kept patting his arm. Frantic, he began cussing loudly and pointing the gun at each of us in turn.

I asked George for his wallet, extracted the three 20s from it, and began talking to the gunman again.

“How much do you need?” I asked.

“$60!” he answered.

“We don’t have that much,” I told him, “but here’s $60. Now would you please get out of the car, and I’ll hand it to you?”

He shook his head. “I need at least $20 more.”

“I don’t have that,” I said. “But here’s $60. Take it and go.”

“Don’t be messing with me!” he snapped. “I have your license number and I have friends in high places and I can find out where you live and come after you. Is your money worth more than your life?”

Sherri was still talking a blue streak. “You don’t want to do this. This isn’t the way to solve your problems... You aren’t going to hurt us because this car is full of angels and God’s presence.”

He countered with, “GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME!”

I looked him square in the face and said, “May I pray for you?”

He paled and stammered, “What? What?”

I persisted. “May I pray for you? I’m GOING to pray for you. Bow your head.”

I bowed mine and began to pray, asking God to help this young man whatever his situation was. I have no idea what I said, but it seemed like a lengthy prayer.

As soon as I began to pray, the mugger took the gun from George’s shoulder—we don’t know if it went back in his pocket or where—he put both arms around Sherri and began sobbing on her shoulder.

“This is unbelievable. I’m supposed to be in charge here! I can’t believe this. What’s happening?” Sob, sob, sob.

Sherri was patting his leg and whispering, “It’s okay. It’s okay. You’re going to be all right.”

When I said “Amen,” he sat up, wiped his eyes, and spoke.

“This is only the second time I’ve done this, and I’ll never do it again,” he said. “You’ll drive off fast and leave me. You’ll call the cops and they’ll catch me. Give me the money and I’ll get out, I promise. I could have taken your purse and wallet, but I can see you’re good people. Just give me the money and I’ll go and we’ll pretend this never happened.”

When he said he could take my purse, I got mad. Exactly one week earlier my purse had been stolen from a cart in the Walmart parking lot, and I’d spent all week trying to cancel cards and get replacements and a new driver’s license! The idea of losing THIS purse was too much!

I faced him with determined eyes. “YOU promise? We can’t trust your promise! You have done nothing but lie to us ever since you got into our car. But I haven’t lied to you! I DO NOT LIE! Get out of the car. Here’s $20. My husband will hand you the other $40 when you’re outside. See? He’s holding it out the window. Just go get it.”

He looked confused. When he’d announced the holdup, he’d pulled his scarf up over his face. When he was crying on Sherri’s shoulder, it was down. Now it was up again.

“Okay. I’ll get out.” He opened the door, the light went on, and he panicked. “Turn off the light! Turn off the light!”

Sherri reached up and turned off the light.

Again he opened the door and put one foot on the ground.

“Ohay. I’ve got one foot out. Now give me the money.”

I shook my head. “Not till you are all out and shut the door.”

“You’ll floor it and take off! You’ll call the cops!”

I shook my head again and leaned forward. “You forgot. WE DON’T LIE! And we won’t call the cops. But there’s one thing you’re going to have to watch out for. We turned you over to God tonight. He’s going to be after you until he catches you. He loves you and wants you in heaven. He’s better than cops.”

Leaning toward him as he half-exited the car, Sherri chimed in.

“Yeah, God’s going to do something in your life. Watch for it THIS WEEK. He’ll intervene in your life somehow. You’re going to be all right.”

Now would you please get out of the car, and I’ll give you the money.”

“No, you won’t,” he said.

When I said “Amen,” he sat up, wiped his eyes, and spoke.

“This is only the second time I’ve done this, and I’ll
He sighed, and leaped out of the car.

George held the money out the window at arm’s length.

He hesitated, shut the door, snatched the money and then grabbed George’s hand and uncovered his face.

“I’m sorry,” he blurted, “and I’ll try to make restitution somehow. I promise I won’t do this again. You’re good people.”

And with that, he turned and ran back up the access road—we think. None of us looked to see where he’d gone! We just drove off.

We hadn’t gone two blocks before Sherri said, “Oh no! Daneen and Stephen might still be at the theater. He might get back there and hold them up—and they have the offering from both showings in a big popcorn bucket. I have to warn them!” She dialed Daneen’s number. We had all been so calm during the holdup, but now Sherri’s hand shook so hard she could barely hold the phone to her ear. To her relief, Daneen reported that they were in the car on their way home. Sherri told her what had just happened.

“No!”Daneen exclaimed. “We came out of the theater right after you. It’s a good thing he wasn’t standing there then because someone asked how much we’d gotten in offerings, and a student called out, “$980! Isn’t that great?” After Stephen and I said good night, we made our way to the rental car which we’d parked on the far edge of the lot in the dark. If that guy hadn’t gone with you, we’d have lost all the offering! I’m so thankful you weren’t hurt. This is terrible!”

True to our promise, we didn’t call the police. But the faculty member who had rented the viewing site did inform the theater manager that someone had been mugged, and he should request police protection for his patrons after midnight.

Back at the hotel, we read Psalm 91 and thanked God for guardian angels. In trying to process the whole thing, we puzzled over why all three of us felt we should pick up this fellow—although it was 12:45 in the morning in a notoriously high-crime town.

“I think God struck us stupid,” Sherri concluded. “He wanted to intervene in that young man’s life and protect the movie money. It’s kind of like the $60 he took was insurance on the $980! If you’d told him no when he asked for a ride, he’d either have pulled the gun on us then, or robbed Stephen and Daneen when they came out a few minutes later. They were young and fit and more of a threat, and if he had overheard the amount of money they had the stakes would have been higher, and they could have been hurt badly.”

“Two old people and a woman had looked like an easy mark. He just hadn’t counted on a car full of angels! As soon as he told us to turn away from McDonalds, I made a plan. I thought if he did anything strange, I’d throw out my left arm and karate chop him across the face and follow it with a right punch. But when he said it was a holdup, God just filled me with love for the guy. We’d been talking all evening about God loving everyone, and I guess God gave me a glimpse of what it’s like to look through His eyes.”

Since then we’ve been praying for the young robber, asking God to turn his life around. We can hardly wait for heaven to hear the rest of the story.
New Year’s Resolutions from the Bible

By Naomi O’Grady

I resolve:

Worry less.

The Sermon on the Mount calls us to worry less about our life, what we will eat or drink, or about what we will wear. The birds do not sow or reap or store up in barns, yet God feeds them. You are ever so much more valuable. The beauty of lilies takes our breath away, but they are transitory. You are more valuable. The Lord gives strength to His people (Psalm 29:11). This means you. God will keep us “in perfect peace whose hearts are focused on Him” (Isaiah 26, heavily paraphrased).

I resolve:

Show mercy.

There was a man who traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was robbed. He was beaten. You know the story. The priest didn’t stop. The Levite had more important things to do. A despised and marginalized Samaritan pulled his donkey over, risked his safety, spent his money, used his supplies, paid the innkeeper, and probably saved the life of a man who, in other circumstances, may have spit on him. Two thousand years later, the Good Samaritan Law reminds us to protect those who stop to save. Mercy, in this story, is a difficult calling. Will we show mercy to those who might not do the same? Mercy can be lifesaving. Mercy can be a cup of cold water. Mercy can be a random act of kindness.

I resolve:

Study and pray.

“Study to show yourself approved unto God, a worker who is not ashamed.” The Bible has been so often used as a club that we can forget the value and guidance it gives us. “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” Keep reading and you will find nuggets that make you say, “Oh, I didn’t know that was in the Bible.” I found in Nahum 1:3, “In whirlwind and in storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet.” I think of that verse every time I fly. When we get above the clouds, I like to think I am at the feet of God.

I resolve:

Don’t be judgmental.

Matt. 7:1; “Do not judge or you, too, will be judged. For in the same way you judge others you will be judged.” Deut. 32:36 says, “The Lord will judge His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees their strength is gone.” How many of us connect judgment with compassion? Most of us like to express our opinions; hopefully, they are not the same as judgments. Opinions are about using “I” statements. “I don’t like that shade of green.” It is my opinion that black cars show dirt too easily. Should the government outlaw black cars? No, it is only an opinion. It doesn’t rise to the level of judgment. We know that juries make fallible and sometimes fatal misjudgments.

The standards in the Bible are there for us to measure ourselves, not others. We cannot read thoughts. We cannot know motive. We don’t know the makeup of another. There are standards in the Bible that we follow to guide our actions and set our moral compass. They are written for our edification and as a means to continually measure ourselves. God’s judgments are made with a degree of kindness and compassion that we can never hope to attain this side of Heaven.

I resolve:

Find joy. Rejoice!

Rejoice in hope. Rejoicing is getting up in the morning, looking out the window, and thanking God that you have another day to love your family, go to work, buy groceries, see friends, and smile! A smile can make a difference even to a stranger in the office or the store. We cannot know why someone looks sad or grumpy, but a smile can’t help but bring some measure of happiness to others. Rejoice in the good fortune of others. There is a generosity in that act that can change families and communities.

I resolve:

Take better care of my body.

I know, I know, this is one many of us commit to every year; it is a difficult one to keep. With the film Forks over Knives I learned how much difference a plant-based diet with proper preparation can make in all aspects of our health. It wouldn’t hurt any of us to strive for discipline in our eating. Our body and our spirit are God’s. He created us and He redeemed us at a great cost. We should value that gift each day and ask Him to restore in us the desire to serve him rightly with a healthy body and a clear mind.

Jeremiah wrote, “I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity. I give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me. And I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” That is really what these resolutions boil down to. God has plans for us and they are hopeful. I resolve to find that hope.

Naomi O’Grady is the pseudonym for a woman church elder in the US.
Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International Responds to Ruguri Statement

Dear Elder Wilson and Elder Caldwell:

East-Central African Division President Pastor Blasious Ruguri recently made the following statement against Ugandan homosexuals at a public meeting at Mbarara SDA Church, Southwestern Uganda:

“Our stand is ‘zero tolerance’ to this vice and to western influence on this crucial issue because God says no to it. We are together with the President and the Speaker and we fully support the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. I call upon all religious ministers, all Ugandans, and all African to say no to Homosexuality. Let us stand for our sovereignty as Ugandans and as God fearing people even [though] the heavens fall[1].”

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International is appalled by the pastor’s use of Ellen White to appeal to common anti-gay and xenophobic sentiment, especially because of the hostile climate Ugandan politicians and allied church leaders have been stoking across the country. This fall, Ugandan lawmakers reintroduced the “Anti-Homosexuality Bill” first proposed in 2009. This law uses the force of the state to undermine the freedom of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Ugandans, those “suspected” of being LGBT, their family members, and any educators thought to be “promoting” the equality of LGBT people.

We’re disappointed that the church’s discussion of compassion at Annual Council this October did not constrain the division leader as he spoke to the Mbarara congregation, regional politicians, and members of parliament. Pastor Ruguri attended Annual Council this year and so heard the church accepting its Christ-given responsibility to offer “caring ministry and words of solace” because “all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are loved by God[2].”

Pastor Ruguri is also a board member of the church’s International Religious Liberty Association, but his recent statement does not express care for the many Adventist members in Uganda and Africa who aren’t heterosexual or respect for their religious liberty or human rights. Through Pastor Ruguri’s statements and the Adventist church’s continued membership in the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, the church is now justifying the prosecution, imprisonment, and potential execution of Ugandan LGBT people and their families.

As Adventists, and regardless of the church’s statements on human sexuality, we believe that the Seventh-day Adventist church should never stand for the violation of basic human rights. The recent End It Now campaign is just the latest example of our church’s track record of standing against violence and abuse. Because of that track record, we do not accept that one of the church’s top-ranking leaders can support legalized violence against a minority group or use the pulpits and authority of the worldwide church to do so.

On its own website, the church affirms the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its firm stand “for human dignity, liberty, equality, and non-discrimination of minorities[3].” The Seventh-day Adventist church has an obligation to strongly and clearly state that it does not support the rhetoric or lobbying of anyone who has promoted putting the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of members, in jeopardy.

Our members in Uganda and other parts of the world now look to you to respond in a Christlike way to these threats to their life, liberty, and security of person, given Pastor Ruguri’s recent statements in the church’s name.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Elliott, President
Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International


Memories of Kampmeeting –
July 2012 – Leesburg VA, USA
Health Tip for the Month

To Sleep or Not to Sleep

In a new study, researchers found that people who don’t have regularly scheduled times for waking up, getting dressed, eating meals, and being active are more likely to have trouble falling asleep and staying asleep than those who do have a schedule. Not only does insomnia make you cranky, it also increases your risk for weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, depression, and fuzzy thinking. Regular daylight exposure helps set your body clock. And just following a routine helps program your mind and body to know that when the lights go out, it’s time to wind down.

But you don’t have to give up your spontaneous zing to get your zzzs. Once you’ve set firm go-to-bed and get-up times (it’s okay to deviate by an hour on weekends or after an occasional late night), go ahead and live large. Just skip stimulants like exercise and caffeine anywhere near bedtime. Also, give your bedroom a no-stress makeover: Banish computers, TVs (people without TVs in the bedroom have twice as much sex, which helps you sleep, too), stacks of bills, even the newspaper. Replace them with soft music and favorite reading material. Outfit your bed in a cozy comforter and soothing sheets and blankets, and then reserve it for sleep and intimate fun. Who said hitting the hay was dull?

The meal you choose tonight could mean the difference between counting sheep and getting some serious shut-eye. In her new book, Eat Your Way to Happiness, Elizabeth Somer, RD, explains how nutrients in salmon, as well as in beans, yogurt, and spinach, could help make you a more satisfied sleeper. The healthy fats in salmon (namely docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA for short) may boost levels of the sleep-regulating hormone melatonin. Beans and other legumes provide a nice sampling of B vitamins, including B6, B12, and folic acid, all of which help the body regulate sleep cycles and produce relaxing serotonin. In fact, studies have shown that boosting B vitamins may help people with insomnia. Yogurt is a good source of calcium and magnesium—two important sleep-supporting minerals that together help you fall asleep faster and ratchet up your deep-sleep time. And skimping on both may lead to muscle cramps, higher stress levels, and worse sleep.

Dark leafy greens are a great source of iron—a nutrient that may help protect against the sleep robber known as restless legs syndrome.

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Member of the Gay and Lesbian Press Association.
Memories of Kampmeeting – July 2012 – Leesburg VA, USA