The next month was awful. Despite my resolution to stay away from the adult bookstores, I continued to give in to my cravings. Finally I snarled at God in frustration. "I can't stand this. What am I supposed to do? I'm trying to change but I just can't do it!"

"That's exactly right," He said quietly.

"Oh. Uh—would You help me, maybe?" God's promise to complete the work He'd begun in my life (Philippians 1:6) started to sink in.

Soon after, I discovered the book *Coming Out,* by Pat Boone, in a Christian bookstore. I found the name of an "ex-gay" ministry in the back, and they encouraged me to contact a local group called Desert Stream.

The meetings provided a sanctuary, a place where I felt safe in talking honestly about my struggles. God used the other men to provide a sense of security and belonging. The healing had begun.

After a month or two of sexual abstinence, I thought I was ready for ministry leadership. When leaders at Desert Stream gently tried to point out that I wasn't ready, I convinced myself that I no longer needed their help, and stopped attending meetings. A month later I fell flat on my face. After repeatedly falling back into sexual sin, I limped back to Desert Stream and joined their 20-week program, "Living Waters."

God used the program in a way that went beyond everything I'd prayed or even hoped for, as He began healing the relational problems that formed the core of my homosexuality.

I started to see where my parents had failed—but also where I was holding unfair expectations and bitterness against them. Forgiveness laid the foundation for a restoration in our relationship. God also reminded me of a childhood vow—"I'll never be like Dad"—that was blocking me from accepting my masculine identity. I started to become aware of how damaging the years of sexual activities had been.

I renounced these past sins, and began experiencing God in a new way, as a loving Father. I was also able to give and receive genuine warmth and caring through my small group at "Living Waters." Through the camaraderie and through gaining understanding of the things that drove me, I received the strength to stop having sex.

One day, though, I expressed my fear of again falling into sexual sin to my group leader. "Who are you going to put your trust in—your sin, or Jesus?" he asked me. That comment really freed me; I realized that I was no longer a slave to my impulses. There were several close calls that year, but the temptations were no longer an automatic prelude to sin.

A lot of hidden hurts came to the light that year. But the pain was cleansing. Much of the hurt came from facing reality, knowing I had to abandon all the sinful ways I'd used to manipulate love and acceptance from others.

I found I had an interest in counseling, and eventually qualified as a volunteer worker with Desert Stream. In 1987, I was told that Love In Action near San Francisco was looking for a staff member. The whole thing sounded like an adventure. Boy, was I ever right about that!

The Lord was "sneaky"; He knew I needed the kind of maturing Love In Action would facilitate, but also knew I was too proud (and scared) to actually apply for their program.

Over the next five years, my involvement in LIA leadership gave me an extraordinary education. I had to wrestle with tangibly applying Scripture in real life, slowly beginning to communicate truth in love, to serve when I'd rather sleep. I got to see the lights go on in people's eyes as they connected with Jesus. I also think I shared a bit in the Lord's sorrow when I saw friends give up and abandon the truth for lies.

Seeing people re-embrace homosexuality had a benefit to it, however. Seeing the pain their selfishness caused friends and families gave me extra pause when I was tempted. The price tag on sin went up in my mind; I didn't want to hurt the many people who cared for me.

In 1992, I came to an even more significant conclusion. I had crashed hard emotionally from a series of disappointments. I was furious with God and people, and so I contemplated rebelling. I mentally examined whether homosexuality had anything to offer.

Pretty unspiritual even to consider it? Perhaps so, but at the time I didn't care. Now, looking back, I am thankful that Jesus didn't immediately wipe out my problems and my pain.

And that's because I reached a critical conclusion: as hurt, helpless, and angry at the Lord as I felt, life with Him was still better than the best days of my old life. Through that period of the "dark ages," I also had to begin facing my immaturity, the demands of a little kid starved for attention and not yet believing that the best, purest, and most reliable place to find that love is with his Father.

God has freed me from sexual addiction, including a life-long struggle with masturbation. He's helping me abandon the sexual fantasies, helping me to see the reality that, although there's an allure, I really don't want to pursue what I know is destructive—so why get stirred up by dwelling on them?

I'm finding the commonality of my strengths and struggles with other men. It's a relief finding out most of my problems are ordinary "guy" or "people" issues.

Once I accepted homosexuality out of hopeless resignation. Now I accept the reality that the desire may or may not completely fade this side of heaven. But surrender to it? No thanks—not when the Lord continues to show me the healing that comes through surrendering to Him.

Kevin currently works for Exodus International as conference director. Copyright © 1989, 1993 by Kevin Oshiro. Reprinted by permission.

Me? A "Real" Woman?

By Jeanette Howard

Growing up, I felt strangely alienated from other girls. But I couldn't identify with boys either. I didn't seem to belong anywhere. Who was I, anyway?

Jeanette, stand in front of the mirror every morning and thank God that He's made you a woman."

This challenge came from a teacher at the Bible school I attended as a young Christian. *What a ridiculous task!* I thought, but reluctantly agreed.

The next morning I got up and struggled to look at myself in the mirror. Try as I would, I could not acknowledge myself as female.

Day after day I persevered. For the first week I struggled to hold my gaze at the mirror, unable to utter a word. After about ten days, I was able to look at myself full face. But when it came to saying anything, I just cried. I couldn't speak, too frightened to acknowledge who I was. Only after several weeks could I stand in front of the mirror and say, "Thank you, Father, for making me a woman." No sentence has ever been as hard to say as that one. For years, I'd felt detached from my femininity.

"You should have been a boy," my mother told me numerous times when I was little, and I had mentally agreed with her. *I'm stronger than most girls my age. I can play soccer with the best of the boys. And I hate dolls.* All good reasons not to be a girl, I concluded.

My father encouraged my masculine pursuits, and I constantly sought his approval. I was never close to my mother. We had so little in common that I'd sometimes wonder, *Am I really her daughter?*

When I was ten, I began attending an all-girls' school. I struggled academically, but I did excel at sports, and was able to achieve some semblance of self-esteem through that subject.

Early adolescence wasn't too bad. All the girls had crushes on each other. We would practice getting married to each other at recess, and pledge undying friendships for the rest of our lives. But, one by one, my friends passed onto the next stage: almost overnight, they became obsessed with boys.

I waited for my interests to change, but my same-sex desires only deepened. By the age of 13, I knew that I wanted a woman to fill the empty places I felt inside. I didn't tell anyone of my struggles. Who could possibly understand?

There's only one way to stay close to my girlfriends, I reasoned. *I'll look like the men they admire.* I had my hair cut like their favorite pop star, and wore the clothes they liked on the men. My plan didn't work. The girls soon ignored me, and I felt like a third sex. I didn't belong—either as one of the boys or one of the girls.

At 18 I entered university and majored in physical education. My doubts and fears about being gay were confirmed when I was seduced by the senior female teacher.

That was the beginning of torrid relationship which lasted four years. The fact that my teacher had four children—the eldest being only four years younger than I—added to my stress level. To deaden my confusion, I drank heavily and dabbled in drugs.

After university, I became a teacher and house parent at a girls' boarding school. I dearly loved the children, and teaching provided stability in my life.

But, after several years, I sensed the need for a complete change. Not being good at confrontation and feeling unable to break off my current lesbian relationship, I took a job in Australia. With such a grand gesture, I figured my partner would get the hint!

I moved to New South Wales in January 1983, and began working in an all-girls' Christian school. It was a perfect set-up for God to begin working in my life. The majority of the teachers were "born again." The town was small and I was 500 miles from the nearest gay bar.

My co-workers dubbed me the "happy heathen." When a few of them tried to witness, I'd quickly change the subject. Conversely, I was attracted to those who never spoke about the Gospel, but who had a quality of life that intrigued me. There was something different about their lives, but I wasn't sure exactly what.

Nine months later I became brave enough to borrow a Christian book from another teacher. "I'll read it on one condition," I told her. "Don't you dare tell anyone else about this!" I even hid the book from my roommate, Sue, and only read at night in bed under the covers!

Satan was fighting a battle for my soul. Unfortunately, as my interest in God increased, so did my interest in Sue. We soon became lovers. The following weeks were euphoric; my physical and spiritual senses were awakened. I wanted to be a Christian and remain gay, yet knew homosexuality was contrary to God's plan.

I left Australia soon after Christmas, 1984. In my mind I was leaving behind the one person I loved: Sue.