At first, I began condemning myself. Where had I gone wrong? Like a mother who bandages a child's scrapes, I wanted to "fix" Susan, to pull her onto my lap as I did when she was little, and correct any mistakes I might have made in raising her. I prayed, "Lord, just give me another chance."

I had always loved having a baby girl, dressing Susan in pink, frilly outfits trimmed in ribbons and lace. Susan's father died when she was quite young, and she was raised by my second husband—a prominent physician and chief of staff at a Los Angeles suburban hospital—until her teens. Unfortunately, he turned out to be a poor choice for a husband and father. He was unfaithful and abusive to me. Many years after my divorce, Susan told me he had sexually molested her from ages five to thirteen. I had no idea this had happened to her and felt terribly guilty.

During adolescence, Susan was the typical "California girl"—blonde, tall, and slender. She was an excellent tennis player, a concert violinist, and an honor student. She was offered a full music scholarship to a southern California college upon completion of high school, but instead, chose to marry a boy she met on the tennis courts. Unfortunately, her husband was killed in an automobile accident during their second year of marriage, which was rocky from the start because they were so young.

"Sometimes I still lovingly confront my daughter. But she understands that my love and approval are two different things."

Following her husband's death, Susan started college. It was there, I believe, she began a lesbian relationship with a fellow classmate. Once I found a note from one of Susan's girlfriends that seemed overly affectionate, but in those days, I didn't make the connection.

I didn't understand much about homosexuality 14 years ago; it just was never a part of my world. Of course I knew all the Bible verses condemning it. But beyond that I was like most other Christians—repulsed by the problem. But now I had to confront it. So I began reading literature on homosexuality and talking to others to learn why it happens and how to help families with loved ones caught in its trap.

One day, when I was at my lowest, and the pain seemed unbearable, God sent an angel into my life. I met with Barbara Johnson, author of *Where Does a Mother Go to Resign?* (Bethany House). Barbara founded Spatula Ministries after she discovered her own son was gay and waited eleven years for him to turn his life around.

Barbara counseled me for hours. She explained that homosexuality is a condition with such deep and diverse causes that no mother should hold herself responsible for "making another person gay." God knows I made plenty of mistakes in parenting—and I'm sure, as with many lesbians, Susan's sexual abuse was a contributing factor. But homosexual behavior is first and foremost an individual's choice.

Barbara stressed how important it was to be in a support group with other parents and loved ones of homosexuals. I couldn't find such a group, so I started a branch of Spatula Ministries in San Diego that has met every Tuesday night for the past 14 years. In talking with hundreds of other hurting moms and dads, we have been mutually helped and encouraged by the belief that Jesus Christ can defuse any darkness in our children's lives. I also co-organized an annual conference that features nationally-known experts who help those struggling with homosexuality and teach others how to minister to homosexuals and persons with AIDS.

In the years since Susan told me she was a lesbian, she has been quite active in the gay community. At one time she was the publisher of a gay newspaper (but she claims I prayed that business into bankruptcy). Now Susan travels the country lobbying for homosexual rights on behalf of an influential gay political caucus. She and her companion own a home on the East Coast.

We talk by phone nearly every week, and Susan sends me cards with lovely floral designs she says remind her of me. She knows about my support group and conferences, and has even attended one of the workshops. It doesn't help to give Susan Christian tapes or books about homosexual; she knows what the Bible says and how I feel about her sexual orientation. She interprets the Bible differently, so we get nowhere discussing it. Sometimes, I still lovingly confront her, but she understands my love and approval are two separate things.

When Susan visits me, we sample a favorite seafood restaurant at the beach or a Mexican one in Old Town San Diego. I just want to be with Susan as a mother, not as an adversary. I feel it's vital to grasp the moment—I may not have another chance to love her. I've seen too many parents lose that chance forever by cutting off all contact with their gay son or daughter.

I know that God is bigger than homosexuality. All I can do is give Susan to God. I cannot change her, only God can. I love her as only a mother can, but God loves her more. Susan has chosen this path, and I must allow her to accept responsibility for her own actions. My role is to be Susan's intercessor, on my knees praying for her and trusting God for the outcome. ◆

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▸▸ *ANALYSIS*

Dialogue Across the "Divide": Does It Work?

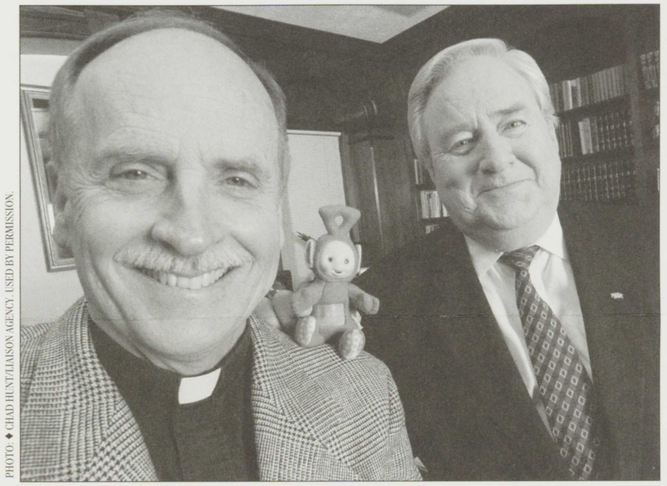

PHOTO: ◆ CHAD HUNT/LIAISON AGENCY. USED BY PERMISSION.

Pro-gay leader Mel White (l) and Jerry Falwell, who said their 15-year friendship was the basis for a recent meeting to discuss their differences on homosexuality.

LYNCHBURG, VA—An October 23–24 rally which involved 200 conservative Christians and 200 religious gays and lesbians drew national media attention. The meeting was jointly hosted by Baptist pastor Jerry Falwell, and Mel White, a nationally-known leader in the Metropolitan Community Church, a pro-gay "denomination." Both Falwell and White said the escalating violence in our society, toward both gays and conservative Christians, prompted the meeting.

Falwell agreed to "tone down" his comments about gays and lesbians, and apologized for past statements which "demonized" gays. But he said he would never change his opinion that homosexual behavior is sin.

White took the opportunity to have some of his group share their stories, including a mother whose lesbian daughter hung herself after the mother told her to stay away until she had repented.

Rev. Bob Stith, pastor of Carroll Baptist Church and board chairman for the Exodus affiliate *Living Hope* in Arlington, Texas, attended the event with Randy Thomas, *Living Hope*'s director. Afterward, Bob said that he was "very encouraged and impressed." Mel White went "out of his way to praise Falwell" and Jerry Falwell "was superb" in his gracious attitude to White's gay group.

Bob Stith: Impressed, but has some concerns.

But Bob also had concerns, especially in finding "that fine line between unconditional love and blurring of conviction." He sensed the ultimate goal of the gays was to convince Christians to "change our minds about homosexuality."

Jerry Falwell referred to the Exodus movement during his presentation to the rally. "Thousands of 'ex-gays' are now living testaments to the fact that God can touch the hearts of homosexuals and call them to wonderful and fruitful Christian ministries," Falwell said. "We need to support and uphold these fellow brothers and sisters in Christ so that others may learn the Truth."

Bob said the most disturbing event for him was a Sunday morning demonstration outside Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church, when many of the 200 gays and lesbians joined the congregation for worship. The protest was led by Rev. Fred Phelps and his followers, who held signs such as "God hates fags," "Fags can't repent," and "Judas Falwell."

"The discomfort of the night before was nothing compared to the absolute horror and sense of evil outside the church," Bob reported. "I had heard of Fred Phelps and company, but I don't think anything can prepare you for being present." Bob saw protestors who were screaming at gays "and calling them incredibly vile names—in the name of God, of course."

"I was so embarrassed and ashamed," Bob said. "I wanted to plead with them to please not mention the name of Jesus."

Bob walked up to several lesbians and began to apologize, but had trouble finishing when he became choked up and teary-eyed. "As if that wasn't enough, the one to whom I spoke grabbed her friends and asked me to repeat [the apology]," he said wryly. As Bob and Randy walked back down the sidewalk, the "Christians" began mocking them for talking to the lesbians.

Bob recalled one last impression: "As we left, our 'Christian brothers' insulted us. The young lesbians smiled and waved." •

—By Bob Davies

▸▸ *CALENDAR*

- **Jan. 15/Baltimore.** "Healing Homosexuality," a seminar for therapists, clergy & family members featuring Richard Cohen. Info: 301/805-6111.
- **Feb. 4-5/New York City.** "The Church and Homosexuality," featuring Dr. Bill Consiglio, John Paulk, Joe Dallas. Sponsored by Hope Ministry of New York City. Info: 212/246-4357.
- **Feb. 11-12/Jacksonville, FL.** "An Affair of the Mind," a conference on overcoming sexual addiction, co-sponsored by Eleutheros and Mastering Life. Featuring David Kyle Foster, Laurie Hall, and Bertie Barber. Info: 904/220-7474.
- **Feb. 26/Tampa.** "Love Won Out" conference on youth and homosexuality, featuring Joe Dallas, John Paulk, Jane Boyer, Joe Nicolosi, Mike Haley, and others. Sponsored by Focus on the Family. Info: 1-800-A-FAMILY or 719/531-3400.
- **March 3-5/Bradenton, FL.** Exodus Southeast Regional Conference, featuring Clay and Mary McLean. Info: 407/629-5770.
- **March 30-April 2/Quito, Ecuador.** Exodus Latin America Conference. All classes in Spanish. Info: (email) eslyc@ibm.net.
- **Mar. 18/Baltimore.** "Healing Homosexuality," a seminar for overcomers, featuring Richard Cohen. Info: 301/805-6111.
- **May 5-6/San Diego.** Annual Trauma & Sexuality Conference. Info: 760/789-4700.
- **May 6/Dallas.** "Love Won Out" conference(see Feb. 26 listing above for details).
- **July 24-28/San Diego.** 25th annual North American Exodus conference, featuring Steve Arterburn, Andy Comiskey, Kathy Koch, Frank Worthen, & over 80 workshops. A brochure with full details will be mailed to everyone on this *Update* mailing list in early February.