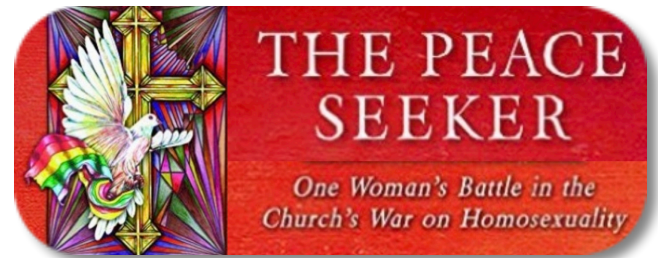


Peace Seeker

One woman's battle in the Church's war on homosexuality (a summary by Pat Evert)

Introduction: I am a Christian homosexual. After many years of seeking, I have reconciled my two worlds and found my long-sought-after peace. **Now I yearn to help others seek the peace I struggled so hard to find.** Christians need to find their roots again. Their lights need to shine—lights of kindness, patience, and joy that this planet needs to point others toward God.



Home, Faith, and the Revelation at Church Camp Five Fundamentals of the Faith:

The Virgin Birth, The Trinity, The Infallible Word of God, The Forgiveness of Sin, and The Resurrection of Jesus from the Dead. The offer of forgiveness was freeing, joyous news that Jesus wanted to be my friend. There were special moments every day that would bless me with a lifetime of memories. I began to realize I was attracted to strong women.

Glory Days: The appeal of mastering a skill and being able to not only play but win, proving the opposing team powerless, is at the heart of the attraction. Strong women bonded by playing powerfully together as a team is the major draw for lesbians engaged in sports. All these aspects, especially the lure of strength and power, fascinated me as I experienced newfound glory under the lights.

Facing Conformity and Conflict: It was my mother who taught me how to face personal and spiritual conflicts. The idea, it seemed, was never to settle or obey rules out of blind obedience, but **to stay true to one's personal convictions.** While the men's parts seemed an oddity, I could see nothing but beauty in the women's lovely round breasts. For quite a while I set my sights on learning to conform rather than further acknowledging my different sexual identity. And the more I dated, the farther away I knew I was from the feelings my girlfriends seemed to have. While my friends seemed to want "forever" with the boys they adored, not one of the boys I dated made me think of marriage or babies. "Gilmore, you'd better watch how you act; you don't want anybody to think you are gay," as if being gay was the worst thing in the world. But I- Am Gay." The experience had surprisingly been an opportunity for validation and courage. I was glad to know who I was, or who I was becoming. It seemed to me that her statement could only have come from another gay person who had experienced a lifetime of hurt.

My spirit of rebellion and soul- searching about my sexual identity was maintained with the arrival of the women's movement. I wondered how I could mesh these church views with my forming self- image bolstered by beliefs of the emerging women's movement? I realized that the church needed to adhere to the teachings of the scriptures but felt there would eventually have to be reasonable compromise with regard to women's rights and permitted roles. If the Bible was not clear on a subject, an action was **not mandatory but open to decision based on conscience**. Among other churchgoers this attitude was seen as rebellion. But to me it was a wonderful acknowledgment of **the freedom we have as Christians**. Her example encouraged me to think.

All In for God: The thought of having Christian ministry as my life's work made my soul rejoice, and I could think of no better way to spend my life than to serve God by leading others to him. **The thought of not being able to love a man brought panic** as it leaped to the forefront of my thinking, only to be pushed aside until it haunted me once again.

Being Held in God's Hand: While my youth group had given me a sense of direction for a future in the ministry, the sudden death of my father provided me with unshakable certainty of God's existence and love, especially in times of trouble. In considering whether my relationship with my father gave me any indication of my sexual orientation, I believed it did— if I had known of the possibility then. Although my father was tall and handsome, even at an early age I found myself more often repelled by his physique than drawn to his beauty. I loved him, but his body hair and musky odor did more to turn me away than to draw me toward him. There seemed to always be an invisible wall between us, built from his side by his seeming inability to show affection and from my side by a force that told me the love of a man was not what I was looking for. When I was sixteen, my dad died suddenly at age fifty-three, which was an earth- shattering experience for me. We had loved him, but it was the rest of the world that told us about the surprising legacy of our silent father. I felt like I was in God's hand and he was reminding me of his love and protection. The peace I felt was transforming, settling the turmoil in my soul. I drifted off into a paradise, asleep in the hand of God.

Making a Break for Independence: Ultimately, my mother's fears catalyzed my own strength. Years of watching them take her further from her potential made me determined to be brave and courageous. Over and over again, I would tell myself to depend on God, that God had promised to watch over me, care for me, and give me strength. Time after time I would run to him— and time after time he would faithfully come to my aid, even when I almost buckled under the weight of my mother's neediness. What I was still missing was one hidden but crucial piece of information: I was not capable of fully loving any man. On the other hand, I didn't know how to give up the fire and deep bond we shared. In the end, I believed the relationship was wrong. The future was calling, and the breakup had to happen. I would do my best to forget her. College was calling. Like every other freshman, I was leaving loved ones behind. I left my mother alone to learn to push through her fears on her own. I left my boyfriend with permission to find someone new. I left the fire I had found in the arms of a woman, promising myself I would never again dabble in lady love.

Bible College and the Bluegrass Boy: I was honored that my peers had seen my potential. The responsibility of planning social events, leading Bible studies, and being involved in outreach programs filled my days with joy. Then one day our relationship was gone, dissolved by too many hours spent apart in different worlds. There was no formal breakup— only a good-bye with no subsequent hello. I was relieved. No longer doing something I felt I shouldn't, my guilt was finally gone. I could now be stamped "Approved" and return to school freed of the deepest secret I had ever held. I realized the deep attachment that needed to be there for me to love or marry a man was absent. On the outside, it looked like we were in love; but on the inside, this match wasn't for me. But deep inside I was beginning to come to terms with my reality—that **perhaps no guy would ever do** and, if not, my future in church service would be in jeopardy.

Falling in Love, Falling from Grace: In the spring of 1979, my junior years in college, my world as I had known it was forever changed when I unexpectedly fell in love with a woman then suffered devastating consequences at the hands of school officials. Being gay in a community that was intolerant of gays meant **I was an outcast, ostracized by my peers while living in their midst**. I had found what my heart had been missing. Men had never managed to light such a flame. I was now both one of the in- crowd and one of the despised. I moved stiffly, almost paralyzed with fear. I had walked this hall as an insider, a helper, a servant and fellow lover of Christ, but this time I walked surrounded by the aura of terror and the shame of disgrace. No counseling was offered, no prayer for guidance said. My years of service were forgotten. My love for God was ignored. In a matter of minutes, I had transformed from golden child to disgraced leper. God had shown grace in the salvation of my soul, but there was apparently no grace available for the current situation. But what amazed me was the maturity of her reaction. She had responded with a mother's love that looked beyond her own cares.

Collecting the Pieces of My Existence: Realizing his ignorance and feeling a new sense of loneliness, I headed home conscious that one more person of the cloth could not help me. I had been accepted— without scolding words or warnings about future indiscretions—allowing me to finish my journey. Academics and **the mind took precedence over the heart and soul**. This type of Christianity was not for me, but I remained focused on why I was there— to study and graduate so I could go into the ministry. I came to the conclusion that no one in this new and very different world really cared about what I had to offer. The pieces of my existence were scattered, and I was alone with God to collect what was left.

Dating an Alien: I knew they were watching me and was almost sure I could be back in the graces of the church's leadership if I had found the right man. But once again the relationship lacked honest communication, emotional intensity, and intimacy.

Unexpected Meeting with a Mermaid: I tried my best to talk some sense into myself. With the recent trouble and heartache still raw within me, I was fully aware that acting in keeping with my true sexual orientation would jeopardize my future and hurt others, who would not approve. Yet

there was something about the mystery woman I could not ignore. Yet whatever we did was shrouded in secrecy. I wanted to shout, “I have found the one!” I wanted more than anything for people to be happy for us. But despite all the joy, I knew they never would be. By the fall of 1982, I knew I had to end my relationship with the alien. Although he would have been almost any woman’s dream, to me whatever excitement had existed was long gone. I regretted the way I had treated him. He deserved a lot more than what I could give.

Calling to Missionary Work: I told myself that if I found a job my relationship with Beth would have to stop, as a homosexual lifestyle could not coexist with my service to God. Yet I could not see my future without Beth. I could not escape the fact that **I would never be accepted as I was.** To my Christian brothers and sisters, I was an outsider. However, in the back of my mind I was determined to see if this would lead to a permanent separation, hoping that, if that was God’s desire for me, my urge to spend a lifetime with Beth would pass. **In the minds of the church officials, I had committed something just short of a crime.** They had wanted to discipline me, to set me straight. I could see it in their eyes and hear it in their voices.

Irish Temptation: I wondered whether the distance between us was indeed working to cool our relationship and if God was making me ready to love a man. The church had told me the scriptures said this was wrong, but instead of being convinced of the truth of these assertions, I had reached a new and dangerous conclusion: if my feelings for Beth were wrong, I didn’t care. **I was now on a path of quiet rebellion.**

Seeing the World and Settling Down: This was no white bread environment; these were folks who had been around the block and knew what God could do for them. We dreamed of a response of grace because we loved each other and God, and they would surely see that we were part of their family. We knew our optimism was a fantasy; fear kept us under a veil of secrecy, which, if lifted, would reveal the devastating truth.

The Secret Sisterhood: I was undaunted by my mother’s feelings, certain that God was in charge of my fate and it was only him that I needed to please. Beth and I were very much in love, and, as it turned out, we were not alone. Some were not ready to embrace the truth about their sexuality. Others had taken a hard look at their homosexuality and had vowed to fight it. Still others had accepted it. But as far as Beth and I knew, no one else had dared to take a life partner. Although the others did not ask us about our relationship, we dreaded the day they might. Fortunately, in the world of our sisterhood there was an unspoken pact of safety. The dating might continue, maybe even for a year. But then the internal dying would begin, and the woman’s emotional brakes would go on. Members of the Secret Sisterhood would understand the truth about why the brakes had been applied—that one more sister had ended her quest to date because of lack of emotional connection and returned to the safety of the Secret Sisterhood.

Love Lost: It might have been wrong to meet Lisa without Beth's knowledge, but it was good to have confirmation once again that Beth was the one for my life. My love renewed, I anticipated going home to reunite with Beth and felt lucky that she was waiting for me. Finally, she confessed, **"The church found out, and I am leaving you."** She hugged me, but her embrace was cold. I realized that Beth must have been waiting for someone to release her from the bondage of being a social outcast. There was no debate when I pressed her for an explanation. But I had questions about her decision: Was she leaving because God had told her our relationship was wrong or because she could no longer stand the double life we led? I could only speculate that Beth believed the church's teaching and it was this doctrine, coupled with the experience of being in social exile, that had driven her decision to leave. The choice of hiding our love or being excommunicated had been too much to bear. She had seen **her chance to no longer live deceptively or be an outcast. I was again torn between what I knew to be right and what I was told was wrong.** I had been taught, and thoroughly believed, that it was healthy to be a member of a church. With our last good-bye, I lost her forever to the ranks of the Christian socially correct. I am not sure which decision involved more pain— Beth's to stay and face the questions or mine to leave and face the loss. As I rose to go, a few of the men spoke words of encouragement, but **not one of them offered to stand by my side in the turmoil.** Alone, I walked down the concrete steps to the world outside. That day I made a decision to love: no matter how cruel she could be at times, I promised myself that I would treat her with the love that only God could empower me to give. She and her husband did for me what no Christians had done— they let me mourn. I spent hours crying and sleeping by their pool. There was very little talking, there was no agenda; there was just time to heal.

Emerging from Darkness through Forgiveness: the truths of the Bible and the necessity of forgiveness. The Final Piece That Brought Peace.

Experiencing the Sunshine of Acceptance..... they now had a marriage of coexistence. By the fifteenth year, Tina knew she had to do something or she would forever lose herself in depression and despair. One day, Tina, a ghost of her former self, sat in our backyard, her body slumped, her eyes brimming with tears. Fear and determination gripped her as the words spilled from her lips in what she thought would be a new revelation: "I'm gay. I tried to do what God wanted, but I just can't take it for the team any longer." However, I had decided I would let no one rob me of my peace again. They had done the unimaginable: by **standing up for those whom most thought were sinners.**

Pioneering Reconciliation: No matter how hard it was for us, it had been much harder for the leadership team who had taken up our cause. For their sake and for the sake of all gay people who sat secretly in worship around the globe, we agreed to stay. Even though I was doing it for the good of the church community, I could not help but acknowledge to myself that I had **once again become a second- class citizen. The casualties may mount as the church continues along its path of ignorance, never realizing that the ones they denigrate sit secretly among them.**

by Susan Gilmore

Conclusion, Becoming a Peace Seeker: A new movement has begun to topple bigotry, to set one more class of people free. My greatest hope is that one day Christian homosexuals will be able to love God free from secrecy, free from second- class citizenship, and **that one day gays will be loved as they are and not ostracized for something they did not choose.**