

business that the couple had started a few years earlier. But as the decade progressed and the children grew, he realized he wasn't happy in his marriage, as much as he loved and cared about Linda as a person. He was now discovering his homosexuality "was not a changeable condition."

Lauderdale finally told Linda (for the second time) about those unchanged feelings. He describes this as "a very painful time" for the entire family.

By mutual agreement, Linda moved out, taking two of their children to Fort Wayne, while Lauderdale kept the other two kids and continued to run their nursery business. He attended a gay support group in Fort Wayne, while Linda dated a fellow congregant in the same city.

In a few years, the pressure of running the business by himself and the unusual situation with his family made the couple agree to relocate to the West Coast, where they could live closer together and move forward with their lives while continuing to raise their children together.

In 1982 Lauderdale moved to Portland with two of his children. The day after he arrived, he attended Peace Church of the Brethren and found a place to live temporarily through a member. Linda moved to Portland with their other children about six months later.

Lauderdale met his partner, Jeff Devore, through the Portland Gay Men's Chorus in the spring of 1982. He describes Devore as a wonderful person, "strong in areas I am not so strong," noting that his partner was "not a people pleaser" like himself. Unfortunately, when they decided, several years into their relationship, to undergo HIV testing together, Devore tested positive.

Despite the diagnosis Lauderdale's partner remained physically active and vigorous. Devore worked for a water treatment plant in Hillsboro—a job he bicycled to from Portland. In 1989 he even made a solo ride from Mount Hood to New York City. He died of AIDS complications June 20, 1996.

Long before it was confirmed, Lauderdale suspected his oldest son, Thomas, was gay. It wasn't that his son was effeminate, he explains, but that he was musically gifted, socially mature for his age and able to connect emotionally with adults in a way other children could not.

Some in society might wonder whether a gay father could contribute to his son's similar orientation; Lauderdale flatly rejects this notion. He says he feels "sexual orientation is a deep thing, unchangeable." The younger Lauderdale's sexual orientation became clear—indirectly—when he outed himself in a *Time* magazine photograph of a gay rally at Harvard University.

In March 2002 Lauderdale was called to lead Peace Church of the Brethren, becoming the denomination's first openly gay man—as far as he knows—to do so. It was not an issue because the congrega-

tion knew him as a person they appreciated and respected.

Lauderdale describes his Portland church as very small but progressive. Although the Brethren church only has about 150,000 members in the United States, they take their beliefs seriously. Lauderdale speaks highly of his congregants and appreciates the support he received from them since that first day he attended a service in 1982.

Today, Lauderdale is at peace with himself and feels that "integrity" is a key word in his life. It's what allowed him 20 years ago to reveal to Linda that his feelings about men had not changed. This was a difficult part of his life because it meant their relationship had to evolve, and he concedes it was confusing to his family.

Lauderdale says it is wonderful to have the opportunity to be a role model to his son and to relate as one gay family member to another. Thomas is the frontman for Pink Martini, an internationally known Portland band blending Cuban rumbas, classical chamber music, Parisian cafe tunes and foreign film soundtracks.

"It's a tremendous gift to me to have a gay son both in the terms of the pride I have in him and in having someone who authenticates my experience in some way," Lauderdale says. "It makes it richer for both of us."

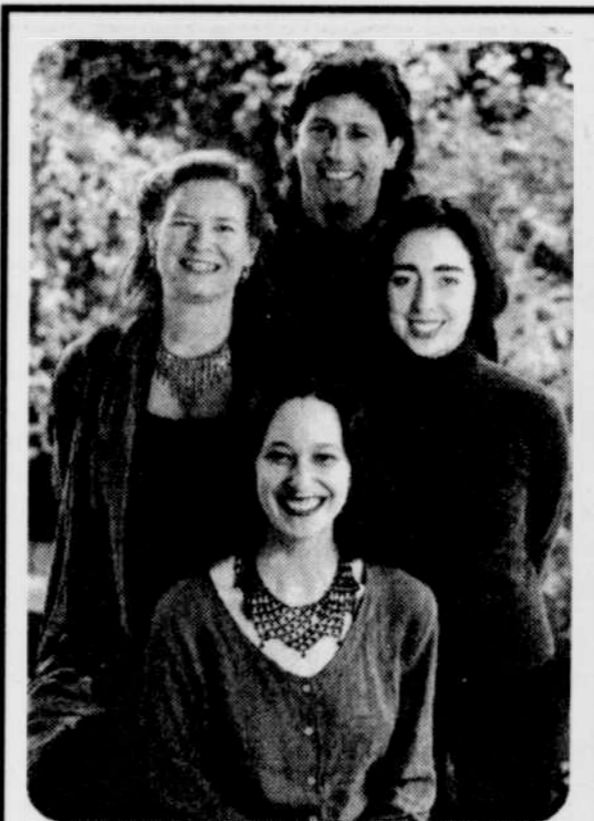
Lauderdale also recognizes and appreciates the extraordinary support of his ex-wife. He notes Linda's "advocacy as a straight woman and a spouse who has endured pain but has always supported and loved" both her gay son and ex-husband. Lauderdale notes with pride that their close relationship resulted in her asking him to officiate at her November 2000 wedding at his church. **J**

PEACE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN is located at 12727 S.E. Market St. For more information call 503-254-6380 or e-mail [pcob@3dwave.com](mailto:pcob@3dwave.com).

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Kerby and Linda Lauderdale join their son Thomas for his 1992 graduation from Harvard University



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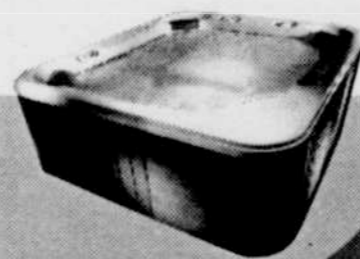
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