

"Monogamy is not existent in most gay relationships," claimed Maier with authority.

He also listed ways that "natural marriage" benefits society, with claims that married people have better emotional and physical health and wealth and that children are less likely to be aborted, neglected or abused in "intact families." Same-sex marriage, he said, did not provide those benefits because it created motherless or fatherless children.

He also expressed fears that children of gay couples would view marriage as outdated in light of the "open marriages" that gays create. Maier failed to discuss the societal effects of divorce.

Back in the sanctuary, former president of the Exodus International "ex-gay" movement, Joe Dallas, and Focus on the Family's director of gender issues, Melissa Fryrear, presented the party line on how homosexuality happens.

Male homosexuality, Dallas explained, was traced back to a man's inability to bond with his father, leading to a "mama's boy" syndrome, making him vulnerable to playground bullying and causing him to have mostly female friends. The dots were not connected between "friends with women" and "sex with men."

According to Fryrear, the path to lesbianism begins with a lack of bonding with the mother. This creates a feeling of otherness from girls and distrust toward men. She added that positive portrayals of lesbians in the media and exposure to radical feminist ideologies and pornography also create lesbians.

Fryrear, a saccharin Kentucky girl, showed photos of herself as a combat-boot-wearing dyke in the '90s and broke down in tears when expressing her gratitude to the Exodus ministry. She plugged her status as single and looking.

Youth pastor Mike Haley, a likable and charismatic speaker, gave his testimonial, "From Prostitute to Pastor."

From their brief speeches, I could buy that Haley and Fryrear made themselves miserable as self-loathing queers. And they swore with dogmatic enthusiasm that their lives had improved since surrendering to God and living hetero lives. Haley ended his presentation with photos of his adorable children. But transferring the success stories of two seemingly happy heteros to an entire queer population is insulting.

The lecture "Why Is What They're Teaching

So Dangerous?" outlined how gays and lesbians have come to be accepted in the media and other mainstream institutions. Craftily leaving out cases of workplace discrimination and other inequalities gays face, the lecture was heavy with propaganda about the goal for gays to portray themselves as victims to build societal support. It attempted to debunk several studies, beliefs and working statistics.

The lecture aimed to disprove that approximately 10 percent of the population is gay; that queer youth commit suicide at higher rates than straights; and that Matthew Shepard was murdered in a hate crime.

I passed the final test in my undercover assignment when I shuffled by protesters and PFLAG parents without being recognized as their ally. I hadn't stumbled upon any electroshock torture devices or even angry, vengeful evangelists at the conference. Yet compassionate bigotry is no better. The lessons from Love Won Out will not bring families closer to understanding. They will not alleviate the pressure on those questioning their sexuality. And they will not be disguised as love until that love is given without conditions. 10

Survivor's Story

Portland man tells about struggle with identity and faith

by Julie Sabatier

Jonmarc Ross knows firsthand how harmful the "ex-gay" ministries can be. His experience with the movement almost cost him his life. Ross, 39, lives in Portland, where he works as a painter for Resurrection Properties. He relocated to P-town 12 years ago from Orange County, Calif., while he was still in the throes of fruitless efforts to "cure" his homosexuality. He gave *Just Out* a window into that experience.

Julie Sabatier: How did you get involved with the ex-gay movement?

Jonmarc Ross: When I say I was raised in the church, I mean that quite literally. I have a really great family, even though they're not really accepting of who I am. There was no shortage of Bible in my house, and consequently I was raised to believe that being gay was not OK. At 17, I started in a 12-step ex-gay program that promised to change me. It was something that I believed was necessary to be in a right standing with God, and I think that's one of the big dangers of these ex-gay ministries. They prey on people with a faith and with a genuine desire to serve God, and they teach them that they're wrong, that they're somehow less than everybody else.

JS: What kinds of methods did you undergo to try to "cure" yourself?

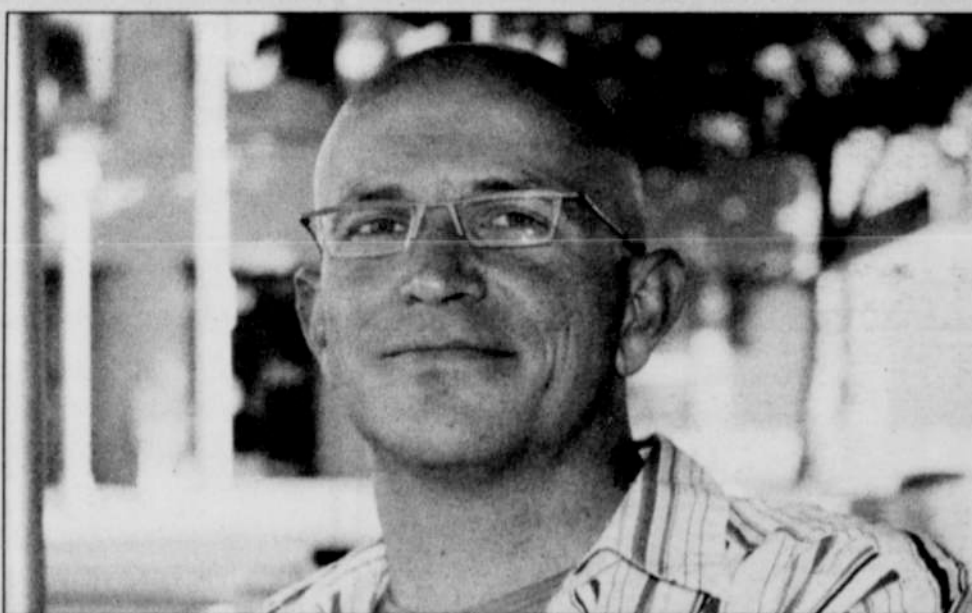
JR: While I was in therapy, I was to keep a journal of any time I was attracted to another man. Lots of studying what [I] call "clobber passages" in Scripture—the passages in Scripture that the ex-gay groups interpret to back their story up...basically using the Bible to clobber people over the heads and beat them into submission. When it wasn't working with [the therapist] he told me I should talk to my pastor. That resulted in my being basically yanked from my position as worship leader and then pulled into the pastor's office for a 20th century version of the Spanish Inquisition with all 13 elders of the church. This was all before I had been with another man.

JS: How much time and money do you think you spent trying to turn yourself straight?

JR: Over 14 years, I can honestly say I probably spent well over \$30,000 trying to change who I was.

JS: What finally made you decide the ex-gay thing wasn't for you?

JR: [I joined] Portland Fellowship, which is an ex-gay ministry here in town. I eventually moved in there and was part of their ex-gay living arrangements, where everybody had their own room and everybody was trying to change. I start-



Jonmarc Ross has reclaimed his faith and his sexuality.

ed meeting openly gay Christians here in Portland, and it really started making me question what I'd been doing for the past 14 years. The end result was that I found myself in the middle of a complete mental breakdown. [I] locked myself in my room for five days and spent the time contemplating how I was going to end my life.... I completely blew my life apart, became an alcoholic and a drug addict and really [was] on the verge of completely destroying myself.

In the midst of all that, [I found] a group of gay, Christian men that meets weekly—it's a group called Anawim. The leaders of that group, when I was at my lowest point, reached out to me. These men had a truer faith and a more secure faith and a more sound hope and love than anybody I ever met in the ex-gay ministries.... They prayed for me and they prayed with me and they loved me back from the brink of disaster.

JS: What is the state of your faith at this point?

JR: I'm happy to say my faith now is probably stronger than it's ever been. My sense of God's love for me just as I am, for who he created rather than for who I had to change and become, is there and in full force. I'm able to be active in Anawim as their worship leader, and I've pretty much got my life back.

For more information about survivors of the ex-gay movement, visit www.beyondexgay.com.

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Aug. 10 - Nancy King & Mary Kadderly
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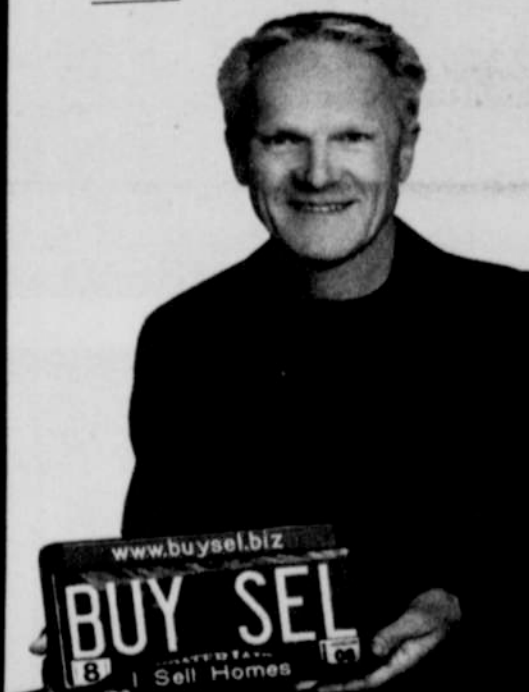
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