

## **Alive**

*by Terron*

I attempted suicide in 1992 at the age of 29. Unlike my previous attempts, this time I succeeded: I was declared dead. But one nurse refused to give up, and I was revived.

Better gay than dead.

A doctor at the hospital convinced me that it was better to accept the homosexuality I had been fighting against than to kill myself. For the first time, I agreed: Better gay than dead. He got me to commit to get a cat or a dog so I would have one being in my life whose unconditional love I could believe in. When I was released from the hospital, I got a cat and named her Nevada. That's the day that I accepted that I was gay. I couldn't fight it any longer.

For the next five years, I pretty much lived as a gay man, with one sexual partner after another. I still believed in God, but my spiritual connection to him started to die. I sent my mother an eight-page letter to tell her why I had attempted suicide. I told her of my depression since her divorce from my father when I was 10, and the sense of betrayal and abandonment I felt from him. I told her of my secret struggle with homosexuality and the conflict that feeling gay caused my conscience. I told her about my short-lived affair with another man that left me feeling more depressed and guilty than ever. I was convinced that once I sent the letter I would never hear from my mother again. Instead, I received the completely opposite response. She told me she loved me no matter what.

In 1994, I took a job in Saudi Arabia. They still stone people in Saudi Arabia for homosexuality and adultery. Once, I actually witnessed a woman being stoned. You would think that would discourage me from finding male sex partners. But I soon found that sex between males is quite common there. Girls are veiled and kept apart from boys after age 12 or 13, and men and women are not allowed any kind of contact until they are married, so it's not uncommon for guys to experiment sexually with each other. Some of these guys never outgrow it, so they have their wife and children at home and a gay lover on the side.

So even in Bahrain, I would walk down the street and be propositioned. Gay sex became a habit for me, a way to find comfort and excitement. But I hated men. I feared men. Yet I longed to be touched and loved and wanted by men. Then I met an American family in Saudi Arabia that "adopted" me into their home. They exuded such love and warmth, it felt healing just to be with them. Spending time with the father and sons, who were in their early twenties, felt like it was filling a deep hole inside of me that longed for male acceptance and camaraderie. I told the father about my struggle with homosexuality, and he responded with unconditional love and support. He saw a goodness and worth within me that I could not see.

Returning to the States, I decided to try one more therapist to help me cope with continuing depression. I found Dr. Dean Byrd, who specialized in reparative therapy of homosexuality. I thought he was nice, and understood the issue, but it was six months before I could let down my walls of distrust and really let him in.

For the first year we never even talked about homosexuality unless I brought it up. Instead, we worked on issues related to my self esteem, my relationships with my family, my fear and distrust of authority figures and men generally, with handling conflict and confrontation.

No matter how poorly I thought of myself, Dr. Byrd consistently told me I was better than I thought I was. He emphasized that there wasn't something wrong with me, there was just something wrong. He kept telling me we would do this together. Finally, I believed him. Finally, I believed I could make it if I had someone's help, not as an authority over me, but as a friend and a guide beside me.

At no time did Dr. Byrd tell me to stop seeing gay men. He never threatened to stop working with me if I didn't give up gay activities. He gently sensed when I was strong enough and had grown enough to begin to phase out of a homosexual relationship in order to move to the next stage of growth. He never used words like breaking it off, or white knuckling, which doesn't work. He used words that were soft, that were non-threatening and respectful of the growth I was experiencing.

Feeling more grounded as a man, and with the strength of a loving therapist to lean on, I began to let go of my homosexual habits and relationships. In their place, I began turning more and more to heterosexual men -- and to men who, like me, were emerging from homosexuality -- for platonic but emotionally intimate bonding. I rekindled my spiritual life and felt closer to God.

I was now able to accept and embrace that male affirmation at the deepest core of my being. In particular, I reconnected with the family that had "adopted" me in Saudi Arabia and who were also now back in the States. My bond with them, especially the father and his sons, was strengthened even more as I related to them from a place of greater security in my own masculinity and goodness. My lifelong yearning to be loved and accepted by men was finally being realized, and I was now able to accept and embrace that male affirmation at the deepest core of my being.

At the same time, I found myself relating to this man's now-grown daughter in a different way. We began connecting as man and woman instead of brother and sister. I began to experience romantic feelings for her, and to find affirmation as a man in her romantic feelings for me. As

our relationship progressed, I found myself feeling sexually attracted to a woman for the first time in my life.

We married in 1998, and now have a beautiful new baby. Finally, I am at peace with myself as a man. I am at peace in the world of men, grounded and connected. I have finally experienced unconditional love -- from my wife, my mother, my therapist, my "adopted" father and brothers and family.

These are men and women who know my secrets and love me more, not less. I no longer yearn for sexual experience in order to feel love. Like an infant who must first receive love in order to trust love and eventually return love, I have been given the gift of unconditional love from godly men and women. Having received it, I now trust it and can give it in return.