

# My Church in San Francisco

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Published by Juliana Harvard, 2021.

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MY CHURCH IN SAN FRANCISCO

**First edition. June 15, 2021.**

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ISBN: 979-8201449582

Written by Juliana Harvard.

To Seventh-day Adventist Kinship for being there for us when  
we needed you.





## Return to Sodom



Ashley had not set foot inside an Adventist church since she was 14—that was nearly 12 years ago back in Fort Worth, Texas, shortly after her father and I had separated. She was a high school freshman, in her first classroom school experience after nine years of homeschooling. Her brother Adam was away at boarding school, also his first year of traditional classroom schooling. After eleven years of homeschooling, he was attending a self-supporting Adventist academy in another state. Fortunately, for both of them, I had taught them “to be thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men’s thought.”

We had been going to Fort Worth First Church only a few months when the inevitable time came that her youth class discussion focus turned to the topic of homosexuals in society. The kids were brutal, stating their opinions that gays “shouldn’t be given any ‘special rights’” and that “all faggots should be taken out and shot!”

The youth teacher allowed each student to express his or her homophobic and hateful views, with some even trying to quote Scripture to support their statements. Then it was Ashley’s turn to speak those room-silencing words: “Are you telling me that God wants you to kill my mother because she’s gay?” It was the last day that Ashley attended the youth class at Fort Worth First Church. Or anywhere, for that matter. I continued to attend church there but found no rationale in continuing to make Ashley go with me, or to keep her from participating in her high school track meets on Saturday mornings.

But the years have passed, and the children have grown up. Both have college degrees and are young professional adults, excelling in their re-

spective careers. Ashley, who still lives in California about a mile from me, does not go to church. Anywhere. Ever. Adam is married, still lives in Texas, and he and his best friend Chuckie (going by the name of Chuck) now teach a youth Sabbath school class in a different Fort Worth area Adventist church. He and Chuck, as co-teachers, are deliberately exploring controversial issues. Like his mother, Juliana Harvard, Adam is teaching a new generation “to be thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men’s thought.”

In mid-April, Adam’s employer sent him and his technology team to work for a week in Silicon Valley—Stanford, to be exact. They finished their job in four days, and Adam was able to arrange his return flight for Saturday afternoon so he could spend some time with his family in Alameda. He was perfectly agreeable to going with Lina and me to San Francisco Central church on Sabbath morning, even though we would have to leave church early in order to get him to the airport on time.

Ashley and Adam are very close, but I never expected her to accept our standing invitation to ride with us into the City and actually visit a Sabbath school class again, especially with the knowledge of how her two moms had been treated there only six months ago. (But that’s for another story.) Now, all she said was, “What should I wear?”

While Lina set up her laptop for PowerPoint slides before Sabbath school, Adam and Ashley and I walked down the block to Crepe ‘n’ Coffee for an omelet and orange juice. Then we came back to the church for the young adults “Anchor Points” class that Dr. Greg Nelson had started before he left Central church in January. I was pleased with the mix of people I saw, which included young lay pastor Mark Ferrell. Andrea, a young professional woman who taught the class, wore an elegant cream-colored pantsuit with stacked heel sandals, and presented an excellent lesson on the nature of Christ. There was a lot of class participation, including comments from Adam. Even Ashley appeared to be interested.

When we went upstairs for church, we went through the Personal Ministries room to get to the sanctuary. Actually, we went there specif-

ically to look for a copy of Jon Marksen's book, *National Sunday Law*, which Adam was wanting as a resource for his youth Sabbath school class in Fort Worth. The literature racks had been freshly filled with a wide assortment of Amazing Facts booklets—including the infamous *Homosexuality—Return to Sodom* by Gary Gibbs that had been a recent topic of conversation on the SDA-FFLAG email group I am privy to as a guest member.

You can be sure that neither of my alert grown offspring missed said pamphlet. They each grabbed a copy then they scampered upstairs to the balcony (which I figured they would do, rather than follow Mom to the second row in front where I needed to be with my digital camera to capture images for the Central church website).

Adam and Ashley heard absolutely nothing of the church service; they were too busy scrutinizing the pamphlet. On our way to the airport, we listened to their facade of raucous laughter as they expounded on their findings.

"Mom, guess what we found out about you and Lina," Ashley began with open sarcasm. "We found out you use inflatable dolls and have 500 to a thousand sex partners who are total strangers. Oh, yes, you molest children, too!"

"I looked up the Bible texts this guy used," Adam chimed in, "and he didn't even quote them correctly. What this guy wrote is *not* what the Bible says!"

As both went on, I began thumbing through the pages of the copy I had picked up and found that all they were saying was true. Mr. Gibbs had begun his paper with a grossly over-sensationalized report of a demonstration by gay activists in protest to a fundamentalist church that was holding a publicized anti-gay meeting. He then compared this event to the Biblical story of Sodom. He did, indeed, misquote and misinterpret Scripture. He stated repeatedly that "the Bible clearly states that homosexuality is sin," without making any distinction between homosexual

orientation and behavior. The paper bore a publication date of 1996, and so many, if not most, of his “facts” were very outdated.

Even the title, equating the Sodom experience to homosexuality, showed a lack of understanding of what not only Scripture but Ellen White says about the “sins of Sodom” as described in Ezekiel 16:49-50, “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.”

This Bible passage is further interpreted in “The Destruction of Sodom,” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 156-170: “The profusion reigning everywhere gave birth to luxury and pride... The love of pleasure was fostered by wealth and leisure, and the people gave themselves up to sensual indulgence... Their useless, idle life made them a prey to Satan’s temptations, and they defaced the image of God, and became satanic rather than divine... In Sodom there was mirth and revelry, feasting and drunkenness. The vilest and most brutal passions were unrestrained. The people openly defied God and His law and delighted in deeds of violence...”

This leads us to understand that the sin of Sodom was pride, riches, and idleness, which resulted in inhospitality, immorality, violence, and abuse, but certainly not homosexuality as an orientation or as a loving, committed, monogamous relationship between two people of the same gender. Given Lot’s desperate attempt to appease the violent aggression of the men of Sodom that night by offering them his virgin daughters, it would seem that they, like the “sons of Belial” in Judges 19:16-28, were most likely heterosexual men who engaged in homosexual rape as a form of humiliation, as well as sexual abuse of females for sport.

Mr. Gibbs seemed to delight in using the word “sodomite” in sarcastic ways, making the word synonymous with homosexual. In actuality, in the five texts in the King James Version of the Bible which use the word “sodomite” it is translated from the Hebrew word “qadesh” which



means a male prostitute in a pagan temple. According to Biblical historians, there is very little evidence about the practices of the qadeshim, and no particular reason to assume they serviced men.

However, as obvious as the absurdity of this pamphlet was to my children, I knew it would not be obvious to the majority of the uninformed and misinformed persons who might walk into Central church and pick it up. Furthermore, we realized how much damage could be done by this erroneous, inflammatory little piece to any gay person, Adventist or not, or their parents and families, who might walk into Central church and find it there. I knew we had to do whatever it would take to get these horrid little books removed from the Personal Ministries literature racks at San Francisco Central Church!

After we got Adam safely boarded for his return flight to Dallas-Fort Worth, Lina, Ashley, and I went back to Central church to pick up the laptop. People were still milling around and were getting ready for an afternoon meeting in the seminar room.

Ashley approached Pastor Mark, who was in the back of the seminar room, and handed him her copy of the pamphlet. He obviously had had no idea the pamphlets were being distributed in the church. With a thinly veiled look of chagrin, he thanked her politely and said he'd "look into it."

I gave copies to the head elder, with a fervent request that this issue be brought to the Elders' Meeting, which was to take place the following Sabbath. The elders did meet, but the topic of this pamphlet was not brought up, we were told later, "due to a lack of time." Nearly a month later, the head elder came up to me quietly after church and told me the pastor had asked the Personal Ministries leaders to remove the pamphlets. I could only wonder how many other people had picked up copies of it—and how much more damage had already been done—before they were removed.

The pamphlets may be gone—for now—but the homophobic attitudes and mean-spirited persons who put them there are not. Adam will

continue to “push the envelope” in the youth Sabbath school class he and his friend Chuck are teaching. Ashley is not likely to attend another Adventist church, and certainly not Central. I can only hope she might visit a “coffeehouse” Adventist congregation (like Hillside Community Church in South San Francisco), but she would go only if it were conveniently located to her. And probably only on the arm of her avowed-atheist boyfriend. (Guess how likely *that* is to happen?!) Or perhaps at some future time she will secretly listen to Dr. Greg Nelson’s wonderful sermons that are still archived on my YouTube channel.

But, for now, Ashley finds it difficult to understand how her “two mommies” can stay—and even continue to serve, albeit without holding church office—in a church that “makes no accommodation” for its GLBT members and claims Biblical support for doing so. My only answer is that Lina and I do what we do for God, not for the church, but in spite of the church. And nothing—not even the church—can separate us from the love of Christ.

As Adventist author Dr. Ben Kemena says so profoundly in *Homosexuality: Another Adventist Point of View*: “The enemy to Christian love and loving is not hate. Rather, the enemy is ignorance.” And the one single fact that people are most reluctant to accept is that homosexuality is *not* a choice. I appealed to Pastor Mark and the board of elders with my paraphrase of Dr. Kemena’s powerful words: “If [Central church is] unable to support homosexuals more, I hope that the church will endeavor to hurt homosexuals less.... [We] yearn to be part of an Adventist church which would rather err on the side of helping hurting people than hurting helpless people.”

April 15, 2005



## I Left My Church in San Francisco



**Y**ou would think that a city like San Francisco should have the most gay-friendly churches in the country. Not so! While some may view San Francisco stereotypically as a gay Mecca, it is also filled with an extremely secular, religion-despising population. Except for the historically gay-supportive denominations like Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) or United Church of Christ (UCC), traditional churches view San Francisco as a “mission field,” a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. They see the Wicked City as their God-given duty to convert before God rains down the destroying hellfire and brimstone and turns the disobedient into pillars of salt. One young married woman was recently told by a well-meaning but ignorant person, “I pray that God will send an angel as He did for Lot to lead Stephen and [you] out of the city before it gets destroyed.”

So when I moved from an extremely conservative and homophobic Texas in 1996 and began attending SF Central Church with my new partner Lina, I fully expected to be ostracized by the denomination I had grown up in and thus be forced to join the ranks of the godless heathen in San Francisco. However, the pastor who was reviewing my church membership request to SF Central asked me this question: Am I keeping the seventh commandment? That was easy! Of course I was not committing adultery. I was faithful to Lina. So Lina and I continued to be welcome at SF Central, and we held church office as practicing church musicians.

A few years later, under a new pastor, one of the gay brothers in the church decided that SF Central needed to have a Gay/Lesbian Ministry;

and he drew up elaborate plans, including a website, which he called “God’s Rainbow.” Gays and lesbians were to be encouraged to take an active part in church life, would be accepted equally with their straight counterparts—including holding church office, and would have opportunities to minister to the gay community of San Francisco, as well as with and for the other gay members in the church. They could even exist within the church as same-gender partnered couples.

There was just one caveat. In order to be in alignment with the denomination’s official position on homosexuality, “God’s Rainbow” had to state a belief in celibacy within any relationship outside of heterosexual marriage. But they also stated that it is “neither the right nor responsibility of the church to pry into the private lives of persons” as “it is the work of the Holy Spirit to determine conviction.”

During this period, many—most—of us came out publicly to the congregation, even from the pulpit. We took part in church services, held church offices, and even led Children’s Ministries and taught a Kindergarten S.S. class on a weekly basis. We were visible at the Castro Street Fair, offering health screening services and consultation on how to boost one’s immune system naturally. We held weekly and monthly small group encounters, soup suppers and discussion groups, which were open to anyone—gay/lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and supportive straight people—all of whom attended our small groups. Some of our regular church attendees during that time included everyone from a local transvestite to a lesbian family with three young children. SF Central Church became known around the world—as far away as Europe, Australia, Brazil, and the Philippines—as a safe and welcoming worship environment. Many gay Christians visited SF Central to worship whenever they were in the Bay Area.

Then, overnight, everything changed. Our loving, supportive pastor left and was replaced by someone with an ultra-conservative background, someone who considered himself “supportive” of gays but, in reality, demonstrates a great lack of human sensitivity and understanding of the

whole topic of homosexuality. The “God’s Rainbow” founder’s partner of 38 years passed away and the grieving widower moved upstate. The first of the final blows came in 2004, just a week after Lina’s and my commitment ceremony in Portland, Oregon.

SF Central had had an influx of young adults, many of whom came from California’s conservative, homophobic Central Valley. Two of them, in particular, blatantly proclaimed to have been given a charge directly from God to “purge the sins” from SF Central Church; then they used deception, stubbornness, and unethical, unchristian behavior to destroy, in one summer, everything that had been accomplished at SF Central Church for the GLBTI community over the previous five years. At the same time, they split and destroyed the budding Young Adult Ministry of which they had become a part.

Suddenly Lina and I were forcibly removed from almost all that had been the focus of our church life for the past three years, the most important of which was our work with children. We were not allowed to hold church office, and no longer allowed to have anything to do with children. The one thing that hurt the most was how none of our older adult friends—those who had supported and affirmed us during the era of “God’s Rainbow”—spoke up now on our behalf. Complete silence. They and the pastor seemed virtually helpless to prevent or counteract what was happening.

My gut-instinct reaction was one of “flight”—I distanced myself from the church and attended my local UCC as often as I could. I continued in the background as webmaster for the SF Central website but came very close several times to letting even that go. Lina’s instinctive response was one of “fight”—not against those who had stripped her of her service to God, but in the act of stepping into other areas of church work with adults, with or without anyone’s “permission” but God’s.

Fortunately, the two troublemakers married each other and moved out of state, though they continued to harass SF Central by email several

months later, condemning the church and its leadership for still allowing those “sinful homosexuals” to stay in the church.

After a year of proving her value in the adult S.S. program, in 2005 Lina was once again allowed to hold church office—but only if the office she held did not put her on the church board. She focused on her position as head organist and director of the adult choir, since she was not allowed to work with the children. She continued to serve the adult S.S. program until 2006, when she was told she could not hold any church office or participate in any church activity that would put her on the platform, facing and speaking to the congregation. So she started a handbell choir, where she stood with her back to the congregation and spoke only through the music.

In the summer of 2006, one of the homophobic church elders started an adult S.S. class on the topic of homosexuality, using a totally biased book by an eccentric preacher from Africa, who twisted both Scripture and logic in really bizarre ways, even including a condemnation in print of the now-defunct “God’s Rainbow” ministry at SF Central. I felt total repulsion at the very idea! However, encouraged by my gay Christian friends and straight supporters on an email discussion group I’m part of, I decided to attend the elder’s class and speak up on behalf of my gay brothers and lesbian sisters, as none of our straight church friends had done for Lina and me in 2004. The class continued for five long, grueling months. It was only by the power of God that I was able to attend week after week, to give a logical, scripturally sound defense to the ignorance being promoted as fact. My mantra became, “It’s not about me; it’s about God and God’s gay children everywhere.”

Now it is 2007. The transvestite has disappeared. The transgenders have either moved away or have declared their vows of celibacy and “miraculous” transformation into being heterosexual. The lesbian moms have not attended for a long time now. They were not allowed to teach an adult S.S. class as they once did, or even to serve as a cantor during the worship service, as that would put them in front of the congregation. The

gay men remaining in the church are either closeted or single. No longer do we have openly gay Christian visitors from around the world or from southern California. Or even from Silicon Valley, 35 miles from here. I'm attending again, cautiously, if only to get photos and news info for the church website and to support Lina in the choir and handbell programs.

And this is what hurts the most. That my beloved church has so wounded these fragile souls and closed to them the door to God. It hurts me that I cannot invite gay people to worship and serve at SF Central. Fortunately, there are support organizations that serve the gay "outcasts" of nearly every major denomination in the United States. Lina and I are blessed to be part of one of those organizations and, through it, can still minister to our gay brothers and lesbian sisters. God has promised (Isaiah 56: 5, 7), "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.... Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."

February 2, 2007



## Last Day at Central



Here I am at Martha & Bros. Coffee for what is probably the last time. It disappointed me that there was no fresh-squeezed pink grapefruit juice this morning, but the fresh-pressed carrot juice is delicious—so much better than the bottled Odwalla.

Even though I haven't been here since June, it's all so familiar—the loud group of women who come here on Saturday mornings after their yoga class at “Mindful Body” down the block, the Latina women behind the counter busily making coffee drinks and toasting bagels.

It was here that Lina and I first got to know Marsha Power, the Adventist lesbian from South Bay, when she drove all the way up to SF Central to hear Dan Brendel in November 2000. So much has happened since then; so much has changed, so subtly, so insidiously.

But, for now, I relax for my last few moments in Martha & Bros., swallowed up in the comfort of the plush red vinyl sofa as I finish a chapter in Stuart Tyner's *Searching for the God of Grace*.

Today I also had my last breakfast at Crepe 'n' Coffee across the street. I splurged and ordered a strawberry Nutella crepe, which was delivered to my table drizzled with chocolate sauce on the whipped cream and on the plate, like they do in fancy restaurants. My small coffee came in a red mug—usually I get a white or black mug—almost as if my last breakfast were meant to be a festive one. And they cooked the five thin slices of gourmet bacon to perfection, hot and sizzling on the plate. And then, as I have been doing for four years, I sequestered myself alone with God, talked to Him in my mind, and “listened” to His message through Rob's sermon manuscript, the third in a series of “40 Days of Love.”



When I arrived at Crepe ‘n’ Coffee, the place had been totally empty except for the nerd in the corner window table and the gay male Hispanic couple, who waved and said, “Good Morning!” to me as they left. It was probably the last time I would ever see them.



NOW I’M HERE IN THE choir room at SF Central, rehearsing with the choir before the church service. On the surface, nothing seems different—Marlena making her silly jokes, the altos asking for a part to be played, Alex with his stole on the wrong side. But we went through “Softly and Tenderly” for the before-prayer song and “There’s a Land That Is Fairer than Day” for special music. I am here today for God, for Lina, and for myself—not for the church....



I WENT DIRECTLY TO the piano side of the balcony to wait for the service to begin. I could see most of the congregation below from that vantage point. Once I saw Gilbert in the congregation and waved and smiled at him. I did not play the piano with the hymns, but Lina already knew about that. On the third song of the Musical Praise Time, Lina spoke from the organ, without a microphone. She referred to the song, “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder, I’ll Be There.” She told the congregation she intends to “be there” and that she hopes they will be, too. There were some “Amens.”

The time came for the choir to sing, even though there were only three men and six women. I played well—not spectacularly, but well.

Before the second anthem, I watched as Lina got the cordless mike from Mark. She arranged her music on the music stand and then she turned to face the congregation, mike in hand, knowing it would be the last time she would ever do so. The congregation was deathly silent. Mark stood motionless, emotionless, not knowing what to expect. Lina spoke. She spoke a little too softly, I thought—at least for her—but her voice

was clear. She talked about the song, how she was born into Adventism, and how all her life she has looked forward to heaven and the Second Coming of Christ. Then what she said went something like this:

“Today is my last Sabbath at Central. Because of some policy changes, I can no longer play the organ or direct the choirs.” She was much too gracious, in my opinion! But what she said placed the “blame” on an action (“policy changes”) rather than on persons (the Nominating Committee).

Then she turned toward the choir and directed them in a beautiful performance of “There’s a Land That Is Fairer than Day.”



DURING MARK’S SERMON, titled “Mount Sinai,” I took some notes. I wrote down four statements that he made:

“There’s a work for you to do if you want to be sanctified.”

“Do what God has given you the ability to do, and God will do the rest.”

The next two he said sarcastically, when he was talking about the children of Israel:

“God could have had their guardian angels appear and *give them all a hug.*”

“God could have rained rose petals on them, and they would have *felt so loved.*”

He also spoke of “transforming grace” which I have believed to be a Catholic concept.



FOR THE POSTLUDE, LINA played another of her fantastic arrangements of a familiar hymn, this one being “Lift Up the Trumpet.” As the last strains were fading into the air, I watched as Helen Wong was pushing Dr. Wong in his wheelchair through the rear doors of the sanctuary. Dr. Chester Wong, who fought so hard to reinstate Steve Gungl as or-

ganist at Central in the '90s, after he had been “kicked out” of Central decades earlier for simply being gay, was now, with head bowed in unaware senility, mercifully ignorant of all that was going on at SF Central in 2008.

After the postlude had ended, there was loud applause from the balcony. I turned to see that it was new convert Jorge Castañeda who has admired Lina from the beginning.

After church, not surprisingly, there was a line of people waiting to talk to Lina. Actually, all of them crowded around her behind the organ so that, mercifully, she only had to say things once and they all heard her. To these people, as to the individuals who approached her last week, she told them the simple truth: “Because I am gay and have a partner, the Nominating Committee has voted that I will no longer be allowed to play the organ here or direct the choir and handbells.” This week she added that the only way that she, as a gay person, would have been allowed to continue her service to SF Central would have been to break up her family of 14 years. And that simply is not an option!

It amazes me that some of the “good brethren” actually think she *should* break up her family in order to continue in her service to SF Central! And they told her so to her face. Essentially, the Church, instead of protecting marriage and family for all, is *promoting* the breakup of marriage and family for gay people.

Michael Buffington came up, and we hugged. I asked him about his girls and told him to “keep in touch.” He said something about he would miss us, and I told him, “It’s not the same church that Lina and I came to in 1992 and 1996. We miss *that* church.”

Bob Evans came to hug me and asked me if I would still be attending Central. I said no. Despite his outspoken homophobia toward the public school’s teaching about homosexuality to his wife’s teenage niece, Bob seems to like Lina and me personally. I will always remember Bob in the role of the angel at the tomb in the Easter performance of the *Messiah* in 2007. I think about how frustrating it must be for a homophobic straight

person to suddenly find out that someone they've gotten to know and respect is really gay.

Patricia Ferrell approached me as, undoubtedly, she felt it was her duty to do as pastor's wife. She said something about hoping we would continue to attend Central. I shook my head. "We just can't attend here. I just don't feel God's love here."

"Oh, *I* do!" she crooned.

"Well, I'm glad you do," I said, "and I'm glad you're here at Central. You're a real asset to this church."

"You are always welcome here." She smiled her pastor's-wife smile.

"No, I'm not really welcome here," I objected. "It is too toxic for me here."

She said something about how God loves everybody. "Yes, He does," I agreed, "God loves even the toxic people."

"Well," she said, "I don't think God thinks of people as 'toxic.'"

"Let's put it this way," I said. "God loves even the people who are toxic to *me*."

"God loves everybody," she repeated, "but He doesn't love 'the sin.'"

Well, we *all* know what "the sin" is, don't we?! I just stared at her, not knowing what to say and not wanting to say anything I would later regret. And she just glared back at me.

Clearly, she is no longer Dr. Patricia Yoon, the eye doctor, but Mrs. Mark Ferrell, in every sense of the word.

When Gilbert came up to hug me, I could sense the unspilled tears in his voice. Neither of us spoke about what Gilbert was going to do now. He isn't an Adventist church member—and may never be—but he continues to attend Sabbath school and church at Central in his deep spiritual hunger and thirst. He so wants to serve God at SF Central but knows he would never be allowed. He said something about feeling "unworthy."

On impulse, I reached into my bag and pulled out my printed copy of Rob's sermon and gave it to him, admonishing Gilbert to *never* feel

unworthy for *any* reason. I said to him, “Repeat after me, ‘I, Gilbert, am infinitely valuable to God.’”

We hugged for a long moment and cried on each other’s shoulder. “Of all the people at Central,” I told him, “I will miss you the most!” And I meant it.

When everyone had gone, Lina and I gathered up the last of our belongings—the Allen sound module on the organ, the Velcro strips left in the choir room, the Swiffer dusters we had kept in the organ bench, and miscellaneous sheets of music scattered here and there. I found a plastic bag to put everything in, and we headed downstairs. On our way there, fourth-grader Rachelle came running up to Lina asking if we were going to have handbell rehearsal today.

“Not today,” Lina answered, her voice quivering. “In fact, we may never have another handbell practice!”

Rachelle was stunned. “Why?!?”

“You will have to ask your mother to explain it,” Lina told her, then turned away quickly so Rachelle would not see the tears that were about to fall from her swollen eyes.

We stopped in the fellowship hall—Loughborough Center—only long enough for Lina to give her keys back to Betty—the keys that she has carried for the past 16 years. In the few moments that Lina left my side to find Betty, Michael, the Russian, managed to find me and flirt with me, not knowing it would be the last time. I smiled sweetly and laughed at his jokes, knowing it would be the last time I would ever have to do that!

As we were driving out of the parking lot for the last time, attorney Steve Booska approached us to give us words of encouragement and affirmation. Lina and I have so appreciated getting to know Steve and his Buddhist wife Amanda and their two adorable children over the past few years. They, more than anyone else we know at Central, would appreciate—and read—a copy of *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*, which we will definitely provide to them.

Steve especially praised Lina for being so “classy” in her farewell remarks, stating that her classiness only made the rest of “them” look stupid.

Lina and I deserved a good meal at Pier 29 in Alameda. On impulse, I had a glass of chardonnay with the snapper in lemon butter caper sauce. We watched the yachts of the wealthy bobbing gently on their tethers in the marina. Then, emotionally and physically exhausted, we went home and collapsed into a most welcome Sabbath afternoon nap.

October 11, 2008



## Epilogue: Emails with Kerry



On October 23, I sent an email to several people in my Outlook Contacts with links to the video clips on the sites, “No on Prop 8” and “Adventists Against Prop 8,” with the simple message: “And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). (Prop 8 was a California ballot proposition and a state constitutional amendment intended to ban same-sex marriage; it passed in the November 2008 California state elections and was later overturned in court on June 26, 2013.)

Here’s a response from a man who had told Lina, to her face, that he thinks she should stop being partnered in order to continue serving at SF Central. Oh, and he has a gay son.



ON OCTOBER 24, HE SENT me this email:

The Lord also says to go and sin no more, so this thing is a huge mess—the whole church has become feminized, with men unable to stand for right, and it will open the door for the church to accept same-sex marriage as being the norm—which it isn’t. How can you talk yourself into this one, Juliana? This isn’t about religious freedom; it’s about gay marriage being accepted by us all.

Kerry



MY REPLY:

“Go and sin no more” was actually said by Jesus to a straight woman, a prostitute, whose sin was promiscuity. It was not said to someone in a lifetime monogamous relationship.

Your statement, “...the whole church has become feminized...” sounds like you think there is something wrong with being feminine. Are you implying that women do not or cannot “stand for right”? Sorry, but that sounds like sexism to me!

No, Kerry, there is nothing in Prop 8 that says that *anyone* has to accept gay marriage! Prop 8 *eliminates* the right of same-sex couples to marry. It will *not* affect schools, churches, or any other institution, in spite of the lies you are hearing on the TV ads promoting passage of Prop 8. Churches will NOT be forced to marry same-sex couples; that is a lie! The only organizations required to extend equal rights to gays are those organizations who are funded by government money. That is exactly why Adventist institutions should not accept government funding!

Regardless of how you feel about homosexuality (including your own son), it is never right to discriminate against any segment of the population.

Kerry, have you read *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives* (the book I gave to Carol)? If not, I would strongly recommend that you do so. It looks at both sides of the issue.

I am praying for you and Carol and your relationship with your son.



#### HIS NEXT RESPONSE:

No matter what books I read for or against homosexuality, I cannot accept it as normal behavior for myself—it goes against my gut feeling about what is right or wrong. When I go down to the Castro and see what happens there, I’m sickened, knowing that this is the lifestyle my son has chosen to live in.

Two men or two women being affectionate with each other really riles me up; in fact, it sickens me, knowing that it could be my son.



You can argue all you like, JH, it is not acceptable behavior for an Adventist Christian person, male or female; you can't couple up and expect God to bless you in that relationship.

I believe the only way to be gay and a Christian is to live a single life and not in a relationship; that's the only way for me, and I've told my son that.

But sadly, most kids when they come out are angry at the world and turn their everything against God, we have three gay boys in our immediate family and that's what has happened—also a lot of people, for instance, the church people don't know how to deal with it, and when they need friends the most, they feel abandoned.

Yes, I'm a sexist—have been all my life—I see the role of males as leaders, of family, church, and state, and that's the way I am.

As for Prop 8—I don't have a TV, so have had no brainwashing there—and don't want to enter into CA politics—if I did, I'd be an Independent as this election is a sham—having a candidate who wasn't born in this country and can't produce a birth certificate. Crazy—only in America.

[I really had to “hold my tongue” about his bashing of Obama!]



#### MY NEXT REPLY:

Kerry, I do not intend to argue with you. Just making a few observations:

1. I certainly \*hope\* you would not “accept [homosexuality] as normal behavior for [yourself]”! You are definitely heterosexual, and a sexist, to boot (by your own admission)!
2. What “happens” in the Castro is not representative of the entire gay community.
3. Homosexuality is not a “lifestyle”—it is an orientation. Vegetarianism is a lifestyle.

4. Just because something “sickens” you does not mean it sickens God or that it is a sin.
5. You have every right to your opinions, as you have expressed in your email. However, you do NOT have a right to not allow other people to have their opinions, too.
6. You are correct that “the church people don’t know how to deal with [homosexuality].” That’s why *Christianity and Homosexuality* was written by the Adventist theologians, scholars, and health professionals who contributed to its writing. But, then, you wouldn’t know that if you have not read the book. I am sorry that the “good church people” continue to live in willful ignorance.
7. Re: Proposition 8 and the elections. I am glad to hear that you are not being brainwashed by things on TV.

Kerry, I mean it—I *will* continue to pray for you and Carol, but even more so for your son and your other gay family members. They are God’s precious gay children, and He holds them close to His heart.

J.

*Addendum: I did not know at the time that this would be the last “conversation” I would ever have with Kerry and that I would never see him again. Several months later, we learned that Kerry had passed away suddenly with stomach cancer.*

*Fortunately, his gay son in England found and connected with SDA Kinship.*





## About the Author

Juliana Harvard's writing spans more than five decades, from her adolescence until well past midlife. It is reflective of her most emotional moments, sometimes of ecstasy and wonder, sometimes of sadness and pain, and other times of sweet melancholy and contentment beyond words.

DISCLAIMER: "These are works of fiction. Any similarities to persons and places are frequent, intentional, and occasionally brazen, but generally fragmentary, inconsistent, and disguised with fanciful invention."

–Stephen Minot, *Three Genres*