

Desert Hope

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Desert Hope's purpose is to extend God's love, truth and healing to people struggling with relational, sexual and identity issues. Our **goal** is to bring a fresh and relevant message of hope and renewal through conferences, retreats, speaking, writing, and international missions.

Desert Hope is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation and operates solely on the contributions of people such as you. All donations to this ministry are tax deductible and will be recognized by a receipt.

Dear Friends,

Since this is the last time that I will write to you this year, I thought it important to share my heart about where I sense this ministry is going.

2010 was filled with several opportunities to speak and minister internationally and nationally; but the winds seem to be changing. For the first time in my ministry, I have no speaking invitations, however, the demand for retreats for mothers and fathers of gay children is ever increasing. For the past 7 years we have led retreats for mothers of lesbian daughters. The moms who have attended these retreats, well over 100 at this point, are now requesting a level two retreat. This year, *for the first time ever*, we held a **retreat for moms and dads of sons or daughters**. My staff of seven and I were overwhelmed with the response. God lovingly held each parent there as they dove into their hearts to get in touch their own pain and deep love for their sons and daughters. Parents are already beginning to sign up for the next one in 2011.

What has become obvious at this point is that our present location can no longer accommodate the expanding need for these retreats. We have already outgrown our offices! While this is exciting, it is also a bit frightening. It means that we will have to stretch, once again, out of our comfort zone. We have no idea what God has in mind, but we know that this next year will be a time of expansion both in terms of our Board of Directors and funding base.

I am sharing this with you because you have been a partner in all that we do. Please join us in prayer as we seek God's intentions and provision. Search your heart and ask God how he would like you to commit to Desert Hope once again and help us with these areas of growth. I am enclosing a commitment card in the hopes that you will let us know that you believe in what we are doing. Your support will allow us to reach more of the hurting moms and dads in our midst as well as their kids. Please join with me and let's grow together!

As a year-end gift to you – I offer this wonderful story. Enjoy!

A Family's Journey

The opening line of Leo Tolstoy's famous novel, *Anna Karenina*, says, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." We were a typical happy family. My husband and I had children, a cat and a dog. We dedicated ourselves to raising our children for the Lord. In order to accomplish this the best we knew how, I chose to be a stay-at-home mom and home school.

When my second daughter turned 16, she got a part-time job. I was surprised and concerned to learn that several of the kids she worked with were openly homosexual. In fact, for the girls, to be bisexual seemed to be stylish. My daughter, who is incredibly compassionate and caring, became close friends with one of these girls. Her friend loved to be in our home. She loved that we were a stable, large family where all of the children belonged to one mom and dad who had remained faithfully married. However, I eventually became suspicious that their relationship was not entirely healthy. I noticed that they began spending a lot of time alone with their arms around each other often all day long. Finally, one day, my curiosity got the best of me and despite feeling guilty for prying, I opened my daughter's diary and started reading. Sure enough, there were love letters tucked away indicating that a romance had blossomed between them. My initial fear had become a reality. My daughter was involved in a homosexual relationship and when confronted, she admitted it was true.

I did not have a clue how to respond to this. I cannot even describe the way I felt in those first few days and weeks. It seemed at the time that if she had died in a car accident it would have been easier to handle. I simply reeled in pain and

shock. I could not wrap my mind around what was happening. How could my little girl who had just gone to the prom with a boy the summer before, now be interested in a girl? How could she have romantic feelings for a female? I was crushed and disgusted at the same time. I had worked so hard to try to teach my daughter safe and godly dating principles with boys that the idea that she could suddenly be having a same-sex attraction totally blind-sided me. It seemed everything I had ever taught her had been discarded.

I would have done anything at that moment to be the mother of a daughter who had come home pregnant – anything but this! All my dreams for my little girl seemed to perish in an instant. My beautiful, little blonde headed girl seemed to be bent on bringing me unimaginable pain.

I will never forget one evening on the front steps shortly after her relationship had become clear, how she looked at me with such a cold, icy stare and in her most hurtful tone spoke to me with words that cut to my soul, “Mom, I am going to prove to you that I can be homosexual and happy!” Those words felt like a sword had just stabbed right through the core of my being. I could not see past myself and the pain she was bringing me.

Meanwhile, my husband was traveling and feeling very helpless as I struggled to deal with the many dark days that followed alone. We looked to the church to give us advice, but it seemed they had no more idea of what to do than we did. The general consensus was that her behavior could not be tolerated. Therefore, we took away every privilege we could think of including her driving privileges. Eventually and understandably, she came to the place where life was so impossible for her that she decided it was better to pretend to be over her relationship than to face the consequences. We, however, took her outward good behavior to be a sign that she was no longer pursuing her girlfriend. However, she was merely counting down the days.

On her birthday, I came home to prepare for her party and found her room completely empty. The bare walls, closets and floors only represented the barren emptiness that flooded my soul that evening. I was devastated again! Again, we sought the advice of our church and anyone else who would give it. Again, we came up empty-handed except for the advice to cut her off both from our family and church. We could not have been more mistaken in the way we handled it, but we only did what we thought best. Our mindset was very black and white. She was sinning, and she just needed to stop.

This last summer I met a Christian counselor who gave me Janelle Hallman’s book, *The Heart of Female Same Sex Attraction*. Immediately I noticed that she did not dwell on the sin issue. She dealt with women from a position of such graciousness that I had to get on the internet and find out more about Janelle. Was she really a Christian saying these things? Her response to women with same sex attraction was so much more loving than the manner with which I had treated my own daughter. I wanted desperately to be allowed to be that gracious to her again.

I found her website and decided to attend the *Healing a Mother’s Heart Retreat*. I knew my heart needed healing. I attended this last November and truly, my heart was healed. By the end of Saturday night, I knew that the experience was life changing. My understanding of Jesus and the gospel was transformed forever. That night I wrote the following in my journal.

“I feel the need to tell Jesus ‘thank you’. Thank you for bringing this into my life. Thank you for my daughter and all the brokenness I have experienced, for it is in this brokenness that I have learned who you are and what the gospel is all about. Without this brokenness I would continue to be a self-righteous Pharisee.

In our family, life had been all about the rules and conformity to them. Therefore, on the outside we looked pretty good. But now I understand what a mess we really were – all of us, not just my daughter. We hadn’t understood that Jesus came *to break all the rules* in order to love sinners – to love me, to love my daughter, to love my daughter’s partner. This is what I needed to learn to do – to break the rules in order to love as Jesus loves.

I also learned another important lesson at the retreat. I was convinced we were an unhappy family in our own unhappy way. I thought we were alone in our own miserable struggle. But when I walked into the room with ten other moms who had been through the same journey as me, I knew I wasn’t alone. Another mom at the retreat told us that when she walked into the room she thought, “Wow! Everyone is so normal!” And so we are – normal people who live in a fallen world, but who have a really big God who can handle all that comes our way.

This January, my daughter will be 22. She is still living with her girlfriend and engaged to be married. They also hope to have a baby someday. These facts are not easy for me, but I can honestly say that I am okay – that the place of brokenness is a good place to be and I am prepared to love them wherever and however life leads, trusting in Jesus and letting God be God. Thank you Janelle and *Desert Hope Ministries* for helping me see the incredible gift God has given me in my daughter and in His Son Jesus Christ. - A mom -