

Mary Black and her husband Jerry have a lesbian daughter. They are co-founders and leaders in a Detroit-area ministry called "Putting a Human Face on Homosexuality." This is Mary's story.

A Letter from Meg

My daughter Meg was born in the spring on a day when the magnolia trees were in bloom. She was a beautiful baby with a very peaceful nature. She grew up like any ordinary girl in America.

She loved to go to her grandparents' house, eat cookies, play with her toys and her friends. She was a sensitive child who seemed to worry about things that other children her age didn't even think about. She once told me that she didn't want to grow up because life was too hard for grownups. Her father and I were concerned when we heard this and took her to the school counselor to see if she thought there was reason for concern. The counselor told us that Meg was a well-adjusted little girl who was just sensitive and not to worry about her.

Her grade school years at St. Mary's of Redford were not the happiest times for Meg. She wore braces on her teeth and was tall and thin and awkward. She was teased and shunned by many of her classmates and withdrew from socializing at school. She developed a sharp sense of humor, which helped her deal with her feelings of inadequacy. When it was time for her to go to high school, we all decided a change was in order and we chose Bishop Borgess High School, which was larger than St. Mary's. She had stopped growing by the seventh grade and remained 5'7", the braces came off and when she started high school, she was a lovely young girl with talent, a strong faith in God and wonderful sense of humor.

She blossomed in high school and went on to win many awards, including a scholarship to the Goodman School of Drama at DePaul University in Chicago. She dated in high school and had many friends of both sexes. She had a wonderful future and we sent her off with only the normal concerns of parents in the 1980's.

Soon after she started school in Chicago, we saw changes in Meg's personality. She became withdrawn once again and her appearance changed. She lost weight, cut her hair all off and wore dark, dreary clothes she had purchased at a flea market. At first, we felt she was just having trouble with all of the emotions of being away from family and friends, and trying to find her way in a new place. Her visits home, which were few and far between, became troubling times for the whole family; we knew something was wrong with Meg, but she would not open up to any of us. For four years we worried and prayed and hoped that things would change.

After a year of no success, she returned home and stayed with us for a while to earn money to move to Los Angeles. During the time she lived at home, she seemed to be happy and well-adjusted, but there was an edge of sadness I could see that troubled

me. We had many long conversations and she would always reassure me that she was fine and that she would find success and happiness soon.

She left for California at the age of 25, full of hope and promise. But almost immediately, we could detect depression in her voice and she was evasive when we asked how her career plans were going. She took odd jobs and kept to herself. She said she was too busy to come home for a visit and made excuses when we said we would come see her. We knew she was struggling with something, but she would not tell us what was wrong. We prayed for her constantly, saying novena after novena to St. Anthony, the patron of things that are lost.

In the spring of 1994, our daughter Jennifer announced her plans to marry at Thanksgiving time and Meg was to be maid of honor. When we all gathered in Ohio for the wedding, Meg still seemed to be struggling to keep up her spirits. The day after the wedding, we drove her to the airport and she gave us big bear hugs and openly cried as she got on the plane. We were all exhausted and thought she was just reacting to the emotions of the wedding. What we didn't know was that she had just mailed each member of the family a letter telling us that she was a lesbian and could no longer hide her true identity.

My world changed forever when I read her letter that fateful day. It was Friday, December 2, 1994. I felt as if I had lost both my daughters that week. It was as if Meg had died. All of my hopes and dreams had vanished in an instant and for a while I could only think about ME. What had I done wrong that made her reject my life and me? Why was she doing this to me? The silence and condemnation that surrounds homosexuality in our society meant that I had no role model of how to react to this news or how to be a good mother to a lesbian. I cried myself to sleep night after night and withdrew from family and friends. I began a long period of intense praying, asking God every day to change things.

In addition to praying, I read everything I could find on the subject and joined PFLAG [Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, a national support organization]. Somewhere along the way on my journey, I learned what my daughter had gone through on her own journey, with no one to comfort her. Like so many gay and lesbian people, she didn't know where to turn. I learned that it wasn't about me – I didn't cause this – I don't have that kind of power. I also learned a lot about love, acceptance and compassion and, hopefully, how to be a better person.

On Meg's birthday a few years ago, I was looking at our beautiful magnolia tree in the back yard and I realized that God had indeed changed things – only in a way I had never expected. I now experience joy in being the mother of a lesbian.

In his story, Meg's father Jerry tells about the help he and Mary received from the organization Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays – recommended to them by a couple in their parish who had gone through a similar experience. Listen to a part of his story as he describes their feelings when he and Mary started their journey, and where they are now.

When we received Meg's letter (telling us she had finally admitted to herself that she was a lesbian), we were totally devastated. We wept and clung to each other hoping that it was all a mistake and that she would soon come to her senses. Although we knew people who were in homosexual relationships and accepted them as friends, we had grave questions on morality. We are practicing Catholics and had been through sixteen years of Catholic schools. We had raised and educated our children in the same manner. In addition, we were terribly concerned about the welfare of Meg. We knew that she would face discrimination and were afraid for her physical and mental well-being. We also faced the loss of our dream of what her life would be like: a successful career, marriage and children. The one thing that did not change was the love we had for her and the respect we felt for her as a person....

It is now more than nine years since that first letter arrived and both my wife and I have gone through a major change in our feelings on Meg's lesbian orientation. Along the way, we passed the milestones of admitting to friends and family that Meg was a lesbian, meeting her partner, staying under the same roof with her and her partner, coming to a personal conviction that religions are wrong in their condemnation of homosexual acts within the confines of a committed relationship, and becoming an activist for gay rights in churches, schools and community. It was a change that took much reading, prayer, meditation and the help of other PFLAG members. Sometimes it seemed like we would take two steps forward and one step back. Many emotional situations arose and at times a sadness still overcomes me – but now it is at the intolerance of churches, governments, organizations and other individuals. We feel that we are now better people for the experience, as we are much more tolerant of diversity of any kind.