

Encourage Testimonial - Michelle Ramonetti

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Encourage gave me an anchor in a very nasty storm. It was a storm that included my parents' homosexual behavior at a time when I most needed the rock of Christ, my teenage years.

My mother abandoned our family when I was only six. She had long been addicted to alcohol and drugs. Thank God, she soon got help for her addiction and has been clean and sober for over twenty years now. Our visits were sporadic, and when I was about twelve, my sister and I visited her in Puerto Rico, where she was born. On a trip to the beach with her and her masculine female friend, she asked us, "What would you think if I was gay?" My sister said that Mami, as we call her, was trying to tell us she was in a relationship with the woman, but I didn't want to believe her.

Several years later, soon after a Youth 2000 retreat in upstate New York renewed and deepened my faith in Christ, Dad dropped the same bomb about an effeminate male friend. This time, however, it was much closer to home, because my dad was all I had left. I knew this relationship was wrong. My sister had become involved with Planned Parenthood by then and pressured me to approve, but I couldn't. Dad's friend was often kind to me, but as I expressed my beliefs timidly but passionately, he began to bully me. For instance, if I called his house to speak with my father, he would accuse me of rudeness for not asking him how he was. Another time, unknown to me, my guidance counselor called him because I had told her how difficult things were at home; because he was a retired social worker, he yelled at me for telling his colleague "lies". These were signs of his impairment, but I didn't know it at the time. During college, my dad sold our house to live with his partner, and I was left homeless. And finally, I received the shock of my life when I learned Dad's partner was HIV positive. He eventually died, and my father never contracted HIV, but I came close to losing him, too.

Needless to say, this combination threw my world into chaos. When I first learned about my dad's same-sex attraction, I searched the web and learned about Encourage. I was, and still am, a rarity on the email list because most of the members are parents of SSA children. And yet, even through text, I've become aware of people with similar struggles to love our SSA family members and friends while remaining firm in the faith. When I was most tempted to believe I was sinning against God or causing my family strife, I could check in and gain sanity. My loving Father in heaven let me witness faith in action, the solid faith purer than gold that He has been forging in me, too.

Fifteen years have passed since I joined Encourage Online. It's not easy at times to rely on writing to convey difficult matters of the heart, but God utilizes our struggles and failings to bring us peace. His peace is true and cannot be destroyed. To this day, even if I do little more than skim the emails, thanks to the way God's healing my sight, I draw fresh lessons from them.

The enemy aims to divide and conquer. He wanted me to believe I was alone and adrift in that storm. But God who is with us and for us brought me together with my brothers and sisters in Encourage. For that, I will always be grateful.