

My Husband is Gay . . .

A Woman's Guide to Surviving the Crisis

By Carol Grever

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Introduction

“My husband is gay.” When a heterosexual woman makes this statement, she is entering a strange land peopled by a secret sisterhood. Her initiation comes when she discovers that the man she married has a different sexual orientation from hers. Her dues may unknowingly have been paid over a long period of years, but the cost of membership in this private sorority escalates greatly from the moment she learns the truth about her own marriage.

Research indicates that more than two million homosexual or bisexual people are or have been married to heterosexual partners. While it is possible for these marriages to survive after the gay partner comes out, most end in divorce. Approximately 85 percent of these mixed-orientation couples eventually do separate, while the remaining 15 percent continue their marriage, usually with some mutually devised alternative contract.

My own marriage was one of those two million and one of the 85 percent. My husband and I had been married for more than thirty years when he told me that he “had homosexual tendencies,” as he delicately understated it. That single moment changed both our lives forever, for once we know the truth, we cannot ever go back to ignorance.

Plunged into a totally unexpected crisis, I needed help but didn’t know where to begin. I wanted practical information, guides, role models—some genuine resources for this frightening new journey. While volumes have been written to encourage married homosexuals trying to come out, less information is

available for the other half of each equation—the straight spouse whose life plan is irretrievably changed. Now, years later, after struggling through many stages toward recovery from my shock, I have written the book I needed to read then.

I began with my own journals. Four times I started to write this book; the first three times, I gave up in discouragement. Who would care to read about my private life? Later, I realized that my earlier attempts were self-centered and myopic. Here was a much more important opportunity—a chance to offer others the help I desperately needed but couldn't find during my earlier confusion. I also understood that the audience for this book needed more than one story to work with. They needed to hear the voices of many other women who had walked this path. I had to delve honestly into the experiences of other straight spouses, without sterilizing or generalizing—just telling their truth. With this broader, more altruistic motivation, the project moved from conceptual to situational, growing beyond my single experience to encompass the hard-earned lessons of many others.

I searched out dozens of other heterosexual wives of homosexual husbands, using advertising, networking, support group contacts, and referrals from health care professionals and related non-profits. The women I chose to interview varied in age, education, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Their homes are scattered between southern California and Vermont. In every case, they were enthusiastic about the project and eager to help other women in this situation. Patiently, they filled out detailed questionnaires, then spent hours talking with me, allowing me to record our interviews.

As I talked with more and more women, it became apparent that each person's experience was unique in its particulars, yet there were many common threads. Frequently, quotes in the book were spoken nearly word for word by more than one person, providing living illustration of recognizable steps from initial shock to eventual resolution. This progression from discovery to recovery is documented in a body of research on these issues. Therefore, each chapter describes a different stage of the progression, related to me in the interviews and recorded in the journals of my own experience.

This is not a scientific or clinical treatise of gay-straight marriages. Other authors, more objectively qualified as researchers and technical experts, have written those studies. Rather, this is a personal book, a survival manual offered from the point of view of the straight wife, sharing my story and that of other women who have suffered through similar challenges. It is about real people who found themselves imprisoned in a secret closet. It is about what we did to cope and what we learned.

Considered together, the women's accounts reinforce my hopeful thesis. Their courageous lives demonstrate that the discovery that one's husband is homosexual doesn't necessarily destroy the possibility of future happiness for either partner. Instead, this dramatic crisis may trigger a process of self-discovery and personal growth, leading to a higher level of honesty, insight, and inner strength. Though the women's names have been changed to protect their identity, their stories are recorded here as they were related to me. Without their

generosity and candid conversation, this book could never have been written. I'm indebted to each of them.

So this is "our book," carved out of the broken pieces of our unusual marriages. It tells of shock, suffering, confusion, betrayal, anger, illness and despair. It tells of pain that was palpable and seemed endless, of secrecy and loneliness, isolation and disillusion. But recovery was the reward for those who courageously struggled through their pain. These women demonstrate the will to survive intact. No, to be even better! Their passage to wholeness exemplifies forgiveness, growth, healing, hope and sometimes reconciliation. Their personal success is a triumph of newfound strength. In sharing our stories, we learned from each other. In offering others the wisdom of our experience, we affirm the possibility of new life beyond this crisis.
