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OUT & ABOUT

The monthly newspaper serving the GLBT Nashville community

NASHVILLE

5 Questions with Jerry Jones



Gene Floyd reflects on her life as the mother of a gay son

Gene Floyd is co-chair of the local PFLAG (Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) organization and the subject of this month's "Five Questions with Jerry Jones."

1. Gene how did you get involved with PFLAG?

Back in the mid 80's, I had heard of PFLAG and started trying to find them. I knew I needed others who were going through the same thing I was in trying to understand what was going on in my son's life and how I could talk with him about it. There was no group here but I did contact the national office and was put on a list of people who would take calls if someone in this general area called the national office. Those connections with others in the area led to my going to a PFLAG Convention in Chicago and deciding to try to start a group in 1987. I met another mother, Janet Hazen, about that time and she was also looking for others. We got together and had the first meeting in September 1987. We have been meeting since then, with some short interruptions.

2. What has been the most rewarding experience you've had in working with PFLAG?

Being in contact and getting to know many wonderful people in the GLBT community in Nashville. I want parents and families to know that the "world does not end" when you find you have a gay child and that they "did not cause it". That is always the first thought, with Mother's anyway.

3. What are the most immediate needs that PFLAG has?

Like any organization, we try to make contact with as many people as we can to get our message out. If the past few years have used several vehicles to do that. Billboards, contact with school counselors, being part of the Yes to Kids conference sponsored by the State of Tennessee. the Oasis Center, advertising in movie theaters. We have been invited in November to speak to a group at the Ford Motor Credit Company during a diversity week.

It costs money to do some of these things, to keep our name out there, so, we try to get funds where ever we can.

4. What is the biggest challenge parents face when they learn a child is gay?

Knowing what to say and how to say it

was my biggest problem. Gay or straight, I loved my son and was determined to not lose my relationship with him. His sister's felt the same way and that helped. I think this is the basic need for most families. To show love and acceptance.

Religious training, or brainwashing, in some instances is a tremendous hurdle in many families. It is helpful, I think, when parents come to PFLAG meetings and see those in the glbt community who are leading happy, purposeful lives. They need to know that being gay does not mean unfulfilled lives any more than being straight. It is what you do with the life you have that counts.

5. I'm guessing from early comments you made, your son is gay. How was his experience coming out to you and what did you do to adjust to the news?

He did not come out to me. It never even occurred to me at all until after he left home to go to college at MTSU. He did not like it and came back after the first quarter (or semester, I forget) and enrolled in Peabody.

He had a roommate and moved into an apartment across from the school. The first time I went I knew there was something else here, the roommate was older,

out of school and the place was impeccable. This was no college roommate. I did not say anything, just observed and thought and prayed about it. It did not last long, Brad left for San Francisco, then traveled in Mexico, Guatemala and about. Stayed in New Orleans for a while and then came home for a few weeks and decided to move to New York City.

The thing I knew was that I loved my son. He did not change during this time and was the same good kid he had always been and I was not going to lose my relationship with him.

All of that occurred between 1974 when he graduated from high school and when he left for NYC in July 1976.

Finally, when I went to visit him there, I told him I thought we needed to talk — so I really outed him. Told him I knew he is gay, his sisters know and we love him very much. So that was that.

How lucky I am to have had almost 30 years of a wonderful relationship with him.

I feel so sorry for those parents who turn away and lose so much. ☹️