

Love Conquers All: A Story of a Family Healed

Soon after learning that her son was HIV-positive, this preacher's wife was dealt another blow -- her husband of 30 years was leaving her for a man.



Lydia Meredith and her son Micah



By Advocate.com Editors

Jul 20, 2017

"It started as a cleansing; it started out as therapy," says Lydia

Meredith of deciding to write her inspiring memoir, *The Gay Preacher's Wife*. Meredith first learned her now ex-husband, Dennis, was attracted to men nearly two decades before they divorced. Looking back, she says they were both very much in denial. "It was my coping mechanism," says Meredith. "Who I was -- my life, my family, my marriage -- was being challenged."

Issues from his childhood were partially to blame for Dennis's denial of his homosexuality, says Meredith, reflecting on the sexual abuse he apparently suffered for years. He was also shamed by his family and told not to "act gay."

"To avoid hostility and persecution from family and church and society, [he went] into the closet," Meredith explains. These stigmatizing belief systems "fuel secrecy and shame," she says. And unfortunately, Meredith acknowledges, she unwittingly passed some of these attitudes on to her son Micah, who is also gay. "He didn't feel safe to tell us," she says, recalling she scolded him as a young child "not to act like a girl," because people would tease him. "I wish I knew

then what I know now," Meredith says.



"There were incidents when I was shamed for nontypical boy behavior," recalls Micah. "I already knew I embarrassed them. Confiding in them would have made it too real."

Micah, who eventually came out to his parents in college, says there was one place he felt safe from stigma and embraced for his unique talents. "Because I was so gifted at music," Micah recalls, "church was one of the few places I could be celebrated."

Later he'd realize how ironic that was: "When I matured as a man, I began to realize ... my parents would not have done this to me if the church hadn't educated them to be prejudiced."

Despite his fears, Micah says his parents were accepting and supportive when he came out. "The immediate acceptance from my parents surprised me. I think they saw it coming."



In a particularly powerful and emotional section of *Gay Preacher's Wife*, Meredith recalls the moment that Micah disclosed to her that he is HIV-positive. Grappling to make sense of everything, Meredith says she was forced to reexamine her faith. Meredith writes that many in the faith community still believe that HIV is punishment for gay men's lifestyles, but she couldn't accept that. "Jesus doesn't say anything about LGBT people -- not one thing," she insists. "Jesus only taught love."

Coming on the heels of learning about Micah's status, Meredith says it was devastating to learn Dennis was leaving her, but, eventually, "forgiveness set me free."

She and Dennis are now good friends and often spend holidays together with their boys. "Love heals," says Meredith. "It doesn't matter what kind of family you have -- it doesn't matter if it's biological or created."

Meredith reiterates the importance of professional help, "Love will help you jump that hurdle -- but at first, it might be rocky. If you are suffering, if you are hurting, get help. Get counseling. But continue to stay together and support each other as a loving family community."

Photography by Jon Dean. Grooming and styling by Kimberly Coulton