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DEAR GAMOFITES AND GAY MORMON FRIENDS (Written: 12/23/96)

For many of us, we will not be spending the holidays with our children and families. The amount of love that we have for them, however, is not diminished, even in their absence. The love of God is here to attend us and them. I hope we can celebrate and remember the significance of this season, regardless how we now view religion, including the LDS Church. It is a time when we celebrate the birth of the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, our Savior.

No other person has influenced the world for good more than Jesus Christ. Wherever His true message has gone, great changes have taken place in the lives of men and nations. One writer described Christ's influence in this way:

"Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30, then for years he was an itinerant preacher. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never travelled 200 miles from the place of his birth. He never did any of the things that accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He had nothing to do within this world except the naked power of his divine manhood. His friends ran away. One of them denied him; another betrayed him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed on the cross between two thieves. His executors gambled for the one piece of property he had

on earth while he was dying, and that was his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

"Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today he is the center of the human race, and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies of the world that ever marched, and that ever were built, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have no affected the life of man upon this earth as did that one solitary life."

Christ is the best example of love, without judgement. He was someone who was ridiculed for being different, unique. It is Christ whom we can look to as someone who has travelled the path of rejection and unfair judgement, but his path was right.

Please remember that our path is right too.

Love to all, Don Robertson

RELIGION: CHURCH ISN'T PLACE TO LEARN SEX

by Robert Kirby

This column is about sex. I'm giving fair warning because this is Utah. Some people may wish to avert their eyes. Also, because it's quite possible that I don't know everything there is to know about sex. Hey, I'm married.

What I do know about sex I learned mostly from my parents, school, various girlfriends, marriage, Scout camps and assorted covert magazines. Namely, that while sex could make you deliriously happy, it also could get you sent to hell, arrested, killed, or even just make you wish for death.

What I do know about sex I learned mostly from my parents ("So much fun you'll think your brain is melting"), Coach Stevens ("You idiots pay attention or you'll get some girl pregnant") and my wife ("Lock the door, big guy").

My least favorite sex lessons came from church. I have vivid memories of sitting in Sunday School while pinch-faced teachers told everyone exactly what God thought of boys and girls who did nasty things. According to them, having sex outside of marriage was "second only to murder."

Give Me Cooties: If the point was to convince me that sex was sacred, it didn't work. At such a tender age, it merely reinforced something I had long suspected; that it was almost OK to kill girls rather than let them give me cooties. Also, that God would mash me like a bug if I didn't protect myself.

Which, of course, is nonsense. First of all, cooties are great.

Take it from me; once you get them for real, you can never get enough.

Second, nobody is going to convince me that a few passionate moments at a drive-in when you're 16 is anywhere close to murder. Unless, of course, the girl's father catches you.

The worst church lesson about the sanctity of sex didn't happen to me. It happened to one of my daughters during a Young Women's meeting several years ago. In an attempt to convince the girls of the importance of remaining virgins, an instructor passed around a plate of gum. Wait, it gets better.

One of the sticks of gum had already been chewed. The girls were then each invited to take a piece. As expected, no one took the chewed one. The point was that no self-respecting husband would ever want a bride who was chewed gum.

Scraping Off an Analogy: This would be a great gospel lesson on chastity if it wasn't a criminally stupid one first. If you don't think so, then we should meet. You need to show me the more important side of this pathetic analogy, the part where repentance unchews the gum. You also need a whack on the head.

See, despite what you may have heard, Brother and Sister Flanders, plenty of sins come closer to murder than sexual transgression: child abuse, wife beating, rape, cheating widows, and rooting for the U., to name just a few.

Using that gum analogy on my daughter comes pretty close to murder, too. If you don't think so, try it again.

Granted, chastity is an important part of being Christian. But it can't be taught effectively by hooking it to a big load of guilt. Making a person feel like something stuck on the bottom of God's shoe isn't what we're supposed to be about.

When it comes to the gospel, understanding and forgiveness can't be achieved through fear and shame. That's because what makes the gospel wonderful is the same thing that makes sex wonderful: love.

(Robert Kirby is a journalist who lives in Springville, UT, with his wife and three children)

I do not have a Director's Message for this month, so I'm going back into my AFFINITY files to 1986. --Editor

A NEW BEGINNING

January 1 is traditionally a time for thinking about the end of an old year and the beginning of a new one. We spend time thinking of what has transpired in the past and what we can do to better ourselves in the future, then we make resolutions to do so. Many of us say we will not wait for January 1 to make these changes, so there always times in our lives for endings and new beginnings. It could be a change in our relationships, our job or Church activity or dealing with our sexuality. Some of these are major changes, and we look to friends, family, or maybe Affirmation to help us through these changes.

It is important for our peace of mind that we are able to accept these new beginnings. One thing about life

nings. One thing about life is that changes are constant and we must be ready for them. Many stay in the same locations with no Gay friends only until they are finished with school, or until they are transferred by their employer, and only then they actively seek a place to live and work that is better suited to their "real" life. Yet, is it not actually better to find a place to have a new beginning WITHIN ourselves, rather than looking to relationships, locations, jobs or the church to find the peace and contentment we seek? When we come to an acceptance of our "true" selves, then the outer endings and new beginnings are easier accepted and we can go on with life.

I pray that each of us will search within ourselves to find peace and contentment; to be able to use our energies in a way that will be beneficial to ourselves and our loved ones, and in service to our community, wherever we find ourselves.

With all best wishes,
--Ina Mae Murri
National Coordinator

The following article is from the January 1997 ENSIGN magazine. I have highlighted some of the passages that I found of personal interest with brackets adding my own commentary. These comments represent my viewpoints only, and is not the official opinion of Affirmation Gay & Lesbian

Mormons. --The Editor

BECOMING WHOLE AGAIN

(Name Witheld)

[Whether this person, like Erin Eldrige who wrote **Born That Way?**, is a real person or a composite of several people, I don't know. But if he is real, I feel compassion and sadness at his suffering and hurting.]

I grew up in a warm and loving Latter-day Saint family. I've always attended church, I graduated from seminary, I served an honorable mission, and I even taught at the Missionary Training Center while attending Brigham Young University. To top it off, I am married for time and eternity to a wonderful wife. **Why would someone like me face the trial of same-gender attraction?**

[This is a universal question most of us have asked, reminding us, while we were "in the closet," we could have written a similar article for the ENSIGN.]

I don't know all the reasons for this weakness of mine, but I'm certain that some experiences I had beginning at age six contributed. **I had a young uncle who was very kind to me, but he taught me some activities that were inappropriate.** [Myth 1: Homosexuals are child molesters. Myth 2: Homosexuality is caused by early childhood experiences.] Sensing that those activities were wrong, when I turned eight and was baptized I

vowed to stay away from my uncle--and I succeeded. However, I longed for my uncle's attention and sometimes tried to seek a substitute with childhood friends. Usually they would no longer be my friends, and often I felt very guilty, bad, and unloved.

As I learned later through study, prayer, and counseling, **same-sex attraction is often a misguided feeling motivated by a longing for true brotherly love or a desire for masculine characteristics one feels he lacks.** [Myth 3: Homosexuals lack "true" brotherly love. Myth 4: Homosexuals lack masculine characteristics.] My father is a good, hard-working man, but **he was seldom home while I was growing up, which in my case contributed somewhat to my emotional deficit.** [Myth 5: Absent father caused son's homosexuality. Myth 6: Homosexuality is an emotional deficit] As I grew older, I immersed myself in school activities and mostly avoided anything related to the immoral behaviors I had learned as a child, though I still sometimes felt attracted to other males.

By my later teenage years, my situation seemed much improved. I fell in love with my wife-to-be during high school, and we wrote faithfully to each other during my mission. When I returned home, I felt confident and full of life. I loved my BYU studies, my MTC teaching job, and visiting my future wife, who

at the time lived in another city. During this season of happiness, I finally felt free of my past weaknesses. Looking back, however, I recognize that I had not yet overcome the deep-rooted patterns of same-gender attraction. [Yes, being born with certain genetic characteristics would be "deep rooted."]

One night on my way home from visiting my fiancée, I somehow found myself in a predicament I never should have been in. After that evening, I was devastated. I knew I had to tell my fiancée the truth--and more than 10 years later, I feel I am only just beginning to understand the grief I have caused her. After visiting with my bishop and stake president and after much soul-searching on both our parts, we decided to proceed with our marriage plans. [Myth 7: Marriage is a cure for homosexuality.] Everyone involved felt I was repentant and back on track.

Unfortunately, that episode was only the beginning. Marriage has been called a crucible that brings out either our best or our worst, and that was certainly true for me. I began breaking commandments again soon after we were married. From time to time I used alcohol in association with immoral experiences, and I was often dishonest. For many years I was trapped in a deadly cycle: sin, remorse, what I felt was true repentance, and then back to sin. I tried to blame others for my problems, but

I could not escape the fact that I was the one choosing to engage in wrong behavior. [Myth 8: homosexuality is a behavior not a state of being.] For years I tried to overcome my sins alone, without seeking sufficient help from Church leaders and other sources of support.

Finally my wife, having gradually come to a realization of the extent of my sins, reluctantly decided she could no longer put up with my behavior. [See Myth 8]. She told me that I either needed to seek help or leave her and our two beautiful children. Feeling desperate, I checked into a hospital psychiatric ward to see if I could gain some control over my life.

The hospital staff very compassionately helped me deal with my childhood pains and my alcohol-related issues, but I soon found out what many [most] professionals think [based on scientific discovery] about same-gender attraction: you are born with it, and the only way you will ever be happy is to accept it. [Child molestation, alcohol problems, and homosexuality are classified on the same level. How could the hospital staff be very compassionate, yet assume his only happiness would be through coming out? This is very contradictory. It is unethical for a therapist to assume a personal bias and expect a certain outcome, which is the practice of LDS Social Services.] However, my wife and I refused to believe it. It just did not

make sense. Heavenly Father put us on this earth to fulfill a divine destiny that can be accomplished when a man and woman join in temple marriage [Myth 9: Marriage is a cure for homosexuality.] --and, like Nephi, we know that "the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Ne. 3:7). Despite the opposition I faced at the hospital, I felt determined to overcome my iniquities. [The true iniquity is not his homosexuality, it is his adultery. This entire article is more about adultery than same gender attraction.]

After the hospital stay, I finally began to rely on the Lord and his servants for help. I confessed my sins to my bishop and stake president, and they offered me much support and guidance, including arranging for me to have a disciplinary council. Looking back, I realize that during the interviews leading up to the council, I still didn't feel especially humble or repentant. I had been through destructive cycles of sin so many times that I was calloused almost past feeling. My wife pointed out my lack of conviction, and my stake president told me that at some point I would need to feel a deeper remorse for my sins, though I was on the right track.

During the disciplinary council, I was finally able to

let go of my arrogance long enough to allow repentance to really begin. I felt literally racked with pain, perhaps as did Alma--but it would be a long time before I experienced the joy that comes with true repentance (see Alma 36:16-21). **The council took appropriate action against my Church membership, and I felt an overwhelming loneliness.** [This is a form of spiritual terrorism. Conform or lose your Church membership, and your salvation.] During the council, I was impressed with the idea that while repentance of such addictive sins is a life-long struggle, my repentance would need to be strong and effective before I returned to full fellowship, because if I returned to old ways I likely would be so trapped in iniquity that I probably would not seek repentance again. I was very sobered by this thought.

Working with my bishop and stake president and with therapists at LDS Social Services, I spent many months trying to humble myself and repair my standing before the Lord as well as my relationship with my devastated wife and family. With constant prayer, vigilance, effort, and support from my leaders and loved ones, I made gradual but solid progress. After two years the disciplinary council was reconvened. Instead of feeling shame and fear, this time I attended the council with anticipation and gratitude. I had greatly missed participating in gospel activities such as

playing the piano for church meetings, partaking of the sacrament, and bearing my testimony. My return to full fellowship was a joyous occasion that gave me even more strength to avoid sin. I pay tribute to my wife, who forgave me for sins that had rocked the very foundation of our marriage. We both know that the Spirit has given us the peace, guidance, and strength we need to survive as a couple.

During my long process of repentance, I learned some things that may help others who struggle with immoral thoughts or behaviors:

* When you have an impure thought, you can recognize it and control it. I have learned over and over again that actions *always* begin with thoughts. **We know that Satan can plant impure thoughts in our minds and hearts** [Myth 10: The devil made me do it.] (see ENSIGN, Sept. 1995, 61). But if we lose the battle at that level, our strength to resist actual temptations will be much compromised. When we accept the tiny seed of an impure thought, if unchecked it eventually grows into a devastating, even salvation-threatening action. Do whatever it takes to control your thoughts! **I find it helpful to say a silent prayer every time I have an inappropriate thought and to replace the thought with a Primary song or hymn.** [For those of us who saw Elder Boyd Packer's filmstrip, **Worth Music Worthy Thoughts**, this will look familiar. It is a form of

aversion therapy. Although in my case, singing that certain hymn triggered all the thoughts I tried to suppress.]

*** Seek advice and help early from your priesthood leaders, especially your bishop.** [With little to no training on homosexual issues, and the church admitting that it does not completely understand homosexuality, why force the issue with priesthood leaders... especially if you are lesbian?] If you feel yourself slipping toward sin, that is the time to see your bishop--not after a sin has been committed, when the damage has already been done. If you've already committed sin, you cannot begin to heal until you confess to the proper priesthood authority. If you're struggling with temptation, leaders can help you only if you seek them out. Even if leaders don't have easy, immediate solutions for your problems, they offer much assistance. Just being willing to work with them demonstrates your faith and concern to the Lord and marshals spiritual support.

* If possible and if your bishop agrees, **seek professional help through LDS Social Services.** [For the latest in 19th Century scientific knowledge on homosexuality.] Their personnel can be a valuable source for counseling and other assistance, such as providing lists of helpful books. I have participated in many private and group

therapy sessions over the years, but nothing has been as effective and long-lasting as working with church leaders and exercising my own faith and prayers. Inspired therapists can increase our understanding and guide and encourage us, but **only our assigned Church leaders can act directly on behalf of the Lord in matters involving our confession and repentance of serious sin.** [If only the Savior himself can heal through his Atonement, why do you need a Church middleman to bring you closer to the Savior? This is more a way for the Church to judge and assess your place in the Church, than to assure the Savior's forgiveness of your mistakes.] Only the Savior himself can actually heal us through his Atonement.

* In addition to professionals and Church leaders, allow appropriate friends and family members to help you. Like all iniquities, **same-gender attraction thrives on secrecy** [The secrecy is the result of spiritual terrorism. If the Church disfellowships or excommunicates you for not meeting their standards, would you not keep it a secret?]; many who struggle with it are paralyzed in their progress by fear that other will find out. Enlisting the help and support of those who truly care can help you in your day-to-day struggles by making you feel more accountable with them in a positive way. While some may reject or avoid you initially, other will respect your commitment to change. I'm continually surprised at

the support and encouragement people give me. I know of several cases when my example has helped someone better relate to another loved one who has the same problem.

* **Develop healthy, appropriate relationships with others of your gender.** I have become friends with many of my priesthood leaders and brethren, and I **find sports a good way to interact socially with men.** [Myth 12: Sports will cure homosexuality though relating non-sexually with other men.] Until someone struggling with same-gender attraction learns to relate to men in a normal way, he won't be able to overcome his problem; one cannot just decide to avoid relationships with men altogether.

* **Avoid people or places that may compromise your actions.** [As true believers in Jesus Christ, who taught among the sinners, shunning should be among the greatest of sins. I agree that if you want to remain faithful to your wife, do not go to gay bars, parks where gays are known to cruise, gay bath houses, adult bookstores, etc.] This is an absolute must! Though it can be painful to give up habitual associations, renouncing dangerous people and places is a necessary first step toward repentance-and likewise, if one finds himself beginning to seek out such people and places, that is perhaps the gravest warning sign before sin is actually committed. This warning also extends in the

same way to pornography, which, as one falls deeper into sin, often acts as the bridge between thinking impure thoughts and seeking dangerous associations.

I have learned that if we fail to fortify ourselves by living the gospel, our earthly trials can wear us down and cause us to despair. But through Heavenly Father's plan, our weaknesses can become our strengths (see Ether 12:27). Through struggling to overcome same-gender attraction, I have learned that Heavenly Father does hear and answer prayers and that he is eager to help us if we will let him. The Lord atoned for all our sins, and he understands all our trials, even same-gender attraction. I have learned that with the help of Heavenly Father, the Lord, our Church leaders, **inspired** [unethical] professionals, and caring friends and family members, same-gender attraction can be successfully resisted and overcome.

I Need Your Help

The Wasatch Chapter has a member who needs to find a gay or lesbian lawyer or gay & lesbian friendly lawyer who lives in the Tulsa, Oklahoma area. This chapter member's heterosexual spouse has filed for divorce in such a manner that he is trying to obtain full custody of their children. Both sets of grandparents to the children are supporting the heterosexual spouse. All

family members involved are active LDS/Mormon and have very conservative - self-righteous/ignorant beliefs regarding lesbians and gays. It would be nice to find a supportive lawyer who is also knowledgeable regarding Mormons or conservative religious attitudes - but not a requirement.

Please E-mail or phone me with any leads on lawyers and also organizations that might be able to provide or help with financial assistance or information. I need this info a.s.a.p.

WasatchAff@aol.com or
(801) 486-6977 (evenings
before 10:00 p.m. MST).

Thank you,

Duane E. Jennings

UPCOMING EVENTS

**1997 INTERNATIONAL
AFFIRMATION
CONFERENCE
20 YEARS OF SERVICE
AUGUST 21 - 24, 1997**

Salt Lake City will show its true colors by living up to that prophetic statement that "This Is The Place" when it hosts the 1997 International Affirmation Conference to celebrate 20 years of service to the Lesbian Gay, Transgendered Mormon, and Ex-Mormon population on the beautiful University of Utah campus.

Many people have already expressed interest in helping organize a celebration of pride and accomplishments in our

community.

The organizing committee is interested in hearing your ideas. Please contact Duane Jennings at 32 East Bryan Ave., Salt Lake City, UT, 84115-1602.

The 1997 Intermountain Conference on Sexuality

The 1997 Intermountain Conference on Sexuality sponsored by Family Fellowship will be May 2, 3, and 4th at the University of Utah School of Social Work.

Jean E. Dubofsky, P.C., former Colorado Supreme Court Justice and lead attorney in the Colorado Amendment 2 appeal, will be one of the speakers!

GAMOFITE RETREATS

If you're interested in joining Gamofites, please know that you are welcome to join us. You'll find we offer an opportunity to associate with Gay Mormon Fathers in an environment of unconditional Love and Acceptance. For information please contact Michael Farr (415) 282-1257 home, (415) 284-8703 work, or E-mail: SanFran007@aol.com

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Contact James Kent for details:
(215) 335-2223 home, E-mail:
james.kent@philfrc.nara.gov

FROM THE EDITOR:

THIS IS YOUR NEWSLETTER

First, I want to wish you all a very happy and prosperous new year 1997.

I want to give a sincere and

heart felt thank you to Debbie Dexter, who served as AFFINITY editor for one and a half years.

I must be a little crazy because I asked Rick Fernandez for this job ... and he gave it to me.

AFFINITY has seen many changes over the years, being as few as 4 pages and as many as 20 pages. I am planning to keep it at 8 pages in 1997. It is also in a 8.5 by 11 inch format to cut printing costs in half.

The content of AFFINITY is pretty much up to you. Letters to the editor, spirituality column, guest articles, current and upcoming events, health issues, Gamofites, women's issues, news on the internet, the penpal section, and any other items that you would like to contribute would be gratefully appreciated.

My address is:

2409 Bleigh Ave., 1st Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19152

Phone: (215) 335-2223

E-mail:

james.kent@philfrc.nara.gov

As all previous editors, I have to maintain the right to correct grammar and punctuation errors (although I am sometimes guilty of them), and edit for brevity's sake.

I welcome constructive criticism, with the hope that you will be part of the solution to that criticism.

With your help, I have a new year's goal to give you 12 monthly issues of AFFINITY.

Take care and God bless,

James Kent

DIRECTORY

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Rick Fernandez

SENIOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Jennifer Hatch

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Joseph Paul Smith

Managing Editor

James Kent

Contributing Editors

Don Robertson, Robert Kirby,

Ina Mae Murri, Duane Jennings

World Wide Web

<http://ng.netgate.net/~jfirth/affirmation>

CHAPTERS

ATLANTA

P.O. Box 4157

Atlanta, GA

(404) 244-9576

PARLYPRATT@aol.com

CHAPTER-AT-LARGE

P.O. Box 517

Jacksonville, Ark, 72078

(501) 982-2624

AFFIRMCHLG@aol.com

HAWAII

P.O. Box 75131

Honolulu, HI 96836-0131

(808) 623-5508

JIMC@uhunix.uhcc.hawaii.edu

LAS VEGAS

3151 Soaring Gulls Drive #2004

Las Vegas, NV 89128

(702) 256-0162

LVSaints@aol.com

LOS ANGELES

P.O. Box 46022

Los Angeles, CA 90046

(213) 255-7251

LASaints@aol.com

ORANGE COUNTY

P.O. Box 8982

Fountain Valley, CA 92728

(714) 502-8844

SaintsOC@aol.com

NEW YORK CITY

Murray Hill Station

P.O. Box 527

New York, NY 10156

LarryManh@aol.com

PHOENIX

P.O. Box 26601

Tempe, AZ 85285-6601

(602) 264-1042 or

(602) 553-8674

DEC15@aol.com

SAN DIEGO

P.O. Box 86469

San Diego, CA 92138

(619) 283-8810

KYMER1@aol.com

SAN FRANCISCO

P.O. Box 26302

San Francisco, CA 94126

(415) 641-4554

CATIM@backdoor.com

SEATTLE

P.O. Box 23223

Seattle, WA 98201

(206) 820-5729

KENEBOY@aol.com

SHARI@Microsoft.com

WASATCH

P.O. Box 526175

Salt Lake City, UT 84152

(801) 534-8693

WASATCHAFF@aol.com

WASHINGTON D.C.

P.O. Box 77504

Washington, D.C. 20013

(202) 331-4425

TODDCHRIS@aol.com

INSIDE USA

AFFINITY FOR WOMEN

C/O Ina Mae Murri

4163 Doane Street

Fremont, CA 94538

(510) 490-5425

COLORADO

P.O. Box 40482

Denver, CO 80204-4082

(303) 771-7169

AlaninDen@aol.com

EDITOR

(714) 597-9256 Voice or Fax

AFFINITYED@aol.com

FAMILY FELLOWSHIP

P.O. Box 9451

Salt Lake City, UT 84109

(801) 272-3806

FAMILY & FRIENDS

(310) 378-3938

BATKIN7222@aol.com

GAMOFITES

(415) 282-1257

SanFran007@aol.com

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL

1404 Charles Ave

St. Paul, MN 55104

(612) 641-8666

HOUSTON

C/O A. Clarke, Lovette Cottage

6310 S. Main Street

Houston, TX 77005

(713) 953-0903

DaveLDS@aol.com

AREA CONTACTS

IDAHO-BOISE

P.O. Box 72

Eagle, ID 83616

(208) 939-0009

BOISEBEAR@aol.com

NEW MEX/WEST TEXAS

2330-A South Solano

Las Cruces, NM 88001

(505) 521-3607

RHAWES@nmsu.edu

PHILADELPHIA

2409 Bleigh Ave. 1st floor

Philadelphia, PA 19152

(215) 335-2223

PITTSBURGH

4811 Elsworth Ave.

Pittsburgh, PA 15213

(412) 683-0763

RICHMOND, VA

3524 Grove Ave #2

Richmond, VA 23221

(804) 358-3492

DANVA@aol.com

SACRAMENTO

2174 34th Street

Sacramento, CA 95817

(916) 731-5922

HAZELBLUE@aol.com

UPSTATE NY

(518) 438-5115

LVFAY@aol.com

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

(707) 823-9464

ghokanso@santarosa.edu

OUTSIDE USA

AUSTRALIA

P.O. BOX 359

WAHROONGA, NSW,

2076

(02) 489-1255

CALGARY

1123 8th Street E

Calgary, AB T2G2Z6

(403) 237-6879

EASTERN EUROPE

C/O Toni

P.O. Box 5063

41040 Zagreb, Croatia

(385-41) 24-54-21

ENGLAND

Michael D. Walker

2/55 Ossington Street

London W24LY

GORDO@vossnet.co.uk

NORDEN

C/O HOFA

P.O. Box 332

FIN-00131 Helsinki

Finland

NJALSSON@cc.helsinki.fi

SWEDEN

S:a Grongatan 38 B

S-831 35 OSTERSUND

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CANADA:

VANCOUVER,

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