

Building a Bridge for Such a Time as This

By: Candace Chellew-Hodge

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The Golden Gate Bridge isn't on the road to Emmaus, but it's where Lisa Darden had her encounter with God.

After being led to Christianity in the early '90s by someone who was gay, Darden, a filmmaker born in Germany but raised in Virginia, discovered the deep divide in the Christian community between gays and lesbians and heterosexuals. She met many prominent leaders in the ex-gay movement including John Smid and John Evans from Love in Action as well as former Exodus spokesman John Paulk. Struggles over her own sexuality led her to question whether one can be both gay and Christian.

"After becoming painfully aware of the division with in the church, one day in 1991, I wa

s driving across the Golden Gate Bridge literally crying out to God asking, 'How on earth would He be able to bridge this divide?' I was incredibly aware of the fact that gays needed to know the love of God, too," she said. "It was while I was on the bridge that I got the idea and name for my production company: Hope Unlimited Productions. Then the vision and the title of the film "For Such a Time as This" just came to me."

It took another fifteen years for Darden, who had worked for many years professionally in film and television production, to begin work on the movie. "For Such a Time as This," set to be released this summer, attempts to build a bridge over the gap between gay and lesbian Christians and the heterosexual Christians who reject them. The film features leaders from both sides of the divide.

"We don't want to only appeal to a gay audience. We really want to cross the divide by bringing this issue front and center in the mainstream. We sense that the timing is right to have this conversation with the nation and the world. We want everyone to participate," Darden said.

Darden hopes that participation will lead to a bridging of the gap that has bitterly divided the Christian community. What she found as she began to build her own bridge was a lot of fear and misunderstanding on both sides of the divide.

"I think in many ways there is lack of compassion and a sense in some circles that people don't even have to care about gays because they believe that homosexuality is a choice and that gays can change, and if they choose to be gay that they will be separated from God and therefore people separate from *them*. That's caused a huge divide that has been difficult to bridge," she said.

"The fear is clearly evident on both sides. There is a prevalent 'Us vs. Them' mentality that keeps people stuck and unable to even *entertain* the thought of getting on the bridge together. There is a lot of vilifying and demonizing going on. People are constantly focusing on the negatives and perpetuating the fear of each other within each other. I believe that's at the heart of the problem."

The difficulty at getting to the heart of that problem became apparent early on as Darden struggled to bring the two sides to the table.

"I was hoping that the mud slinging and name calling might stop long enough to get a few decent words in edgewise and that I might be able to encourage them to play nice," she said. "When I realized that no one was willing to cross the picket line, I knew my job would be to get them all together in the film and hope and pray that at some point they would be able to reach some common ground."

As she interviewed leaders on both sides of the divide including tennis great Billie Jean King and evangelical leaders Tony and Peggy Campolo, Darden said she found many leaders need to put Christ back in Christianity.

"There is so much about those who are most vocal in the Christian world whose actions are anything but Christ-like, and not just with regard to homosexuality. This message of rejection and pomposity is what the struggling Christian - gay or straight - hears and sees, and for those who are reaching out for God's love, this sort of denunciation just serves to turn those who are most in need away from knowing Him and truly experiencing the joy and peace of the Lord," she said.

"Just because something is uncomfortable doesn't mean it should be

ignored or dealt with negatively. Sometimes we need to embrace the uncomfortable in order to learn and to grow from it. That's how we will begin to bridge the divide."

Other projects have sprung out from the film project, including a television show called "Struggles and Victories" that is slated to start in 2009.

Darden is also putting together The Wave Festival that will bring together recording artists, leaders and other performers featured in the film. The festival will be held in Newport Beach, California on October 18-19, 2008.

Darden believes God's timing is in this project and hopes the film will be one of many projects that will finally bridge the gap.

"It seems like a lot of people are looking for permission to do the right thing and it is important that people stand up and encourage and try to lead people into making educated and compassionate choices towards loving other people even if we don't always agree with them," she said. "I am hopeful that we can help bridge this divide for many people. Not everyone will come but I believe a good number of them will, simply because it is, 'For Such a Time as This.'"

For more information on the upcoming film, "For Such a Time as This," visit Darden's Web site hopeunlimitedproductions.com

Candace Chellew-Hodge is a recovering Southern Baptist and founder/editor of Whosoever: An Online Magazine for GLBT Christians. Her new book, *Bulletproof Faith: A Spiritual Survival Guide for Gay and Lesbian Christians*, will be published in September 2008 by Jossey-Bass. She currently serves as associate pastor at Garden of Grace United Church of Christ in Columbia, S.C. She is also a spiritual director, trained through the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta. She has worked for the past two decades in journalism and public relations. She can be reached by email at editor-at-whosoever.org.