

I Love Jim, But I Almost Never Met Him!

By Judy Rickard

Back in the 1970's, when the fierce battle against gays and lesbians was forming in Santa Clara County, Jim McEntee was bombarded by strong-willed, determined church members, whose leader was Rev. Marvin Rickard of Los Gatos Christian Church, a forerunner of the huge community churches that grew and flourished in America in the '70's and '80's and expanded even more in the 21st century.

As an out lesbian, but not out to all relatives at the time, I was distressed that a member of my own family was working so hard to hurt me and my community. I wrote a letter to Marvin, told him I thought he was wrong, and asked to meet with him. I called up the Santa Clara County Human Relations Office and asked to meet with the director, who they said was Jim McEntee. I wanted to talk to him about the issues and seek his help on dealing with the contentiousness that I knew would only get worse.

I didn't get my calls returned, so after a few tries, I went down to the building and found the office and asked to meet with Mr. McEntee. I was shown to his space and he did not look happy to see me. I explained who I was and he sort of interrupted me and said "Your people have been here a lot." I was shocked. I had no idea gays and lesbians had already met with Jim. I said "I'm sorry to bother you. I didn't know you had already met with the gay and lesbian community – I'm glad."

He looked sort of confused, then sheepish, and said "You're not with Marvin's church?"

I said "No way!" I told him I had written to Marvin and told him I thought he was wrong. I told him that I did not agree with Marvin and was upset that there was so much support for the position and that they could rally troops to oppose human rights issues.

He smiled. We chatted. I left feeling like I had made a great new friend. I had!

Over the years, when we would sit at meetings together, walk picket lines together, eat at fundraising dinners together, I would realize what a stretch he had made that day. By assuming my same last name meant I believed the same things as my cousin, Jim could have not moved forward to make a good connection with me as a person or my community of gays and lesbians. Because we had so much interaction with various issues, I learned to trust and love him and his wonderful wife Ann. When my former partner and I had a commitment celebration, they were among the guests at our home.

Jim modeled the right behavior that first day we met – and all others. Always a man of conviction, he did the right thing then and again and again. He took the time to meet me and hear me out – and got a surprise in the bargain.

He pushed past assumption and found something surprising – a helper in the cause and a thankful community member.

God Bless You, Jim! You are sorely missed in the ongoing fight to get right with each other and the earth we share and depend upon.