

Dear Abby

Mom's support gave son love to last lifetime

DEAR ABBY: I grew up in an extremely conservative, rural area of northeast Mississippi in the '60s. I came out as gay to my mom when I was 13 in 1970, and she said three things to me that set the course for a lifetime of love. As she hugged me, she said, "I will always love you, no matter what."

Then, looking me straight in the eye, she thanked me for my honesty before again pulling me into her arms and whispering, "I've known since you were a small boy."

I was overwhelmed by her acceptance, not to mention her validating words, and we wept together. Our relationship became so much closer and stronger. I never missed calling her every day of her life. We shared our ups and downs, our dreams, failures and successes. Most of all, we laughed – a lot.

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I raised two sons and two daughters. One son and both daughters married well. Our other son, "Neil," is gay. He and his partner, "Ron," have been together 15 years, but Neil's father and I never wanted to know Ron because we disapproved of their lifestyle.

I was 74 when my husband died, leaving me in ill health and nearly penniless. No longer able to live alone, I asked my married son and two daughters if I could "visit" each of them for four months a year. (I didn't want to burden any one family and thought living out of a suitcase would be best for everyone.) All three of them turned me down! Feeling unwanted, I wanted to die.

When Neil and Ron heard what had happened, they invited me to move across the country and live with them.

They welcomed me into their home and even removed a wall between two rooms so I'd have a bedroom with a private bath and sitting room – although we spend most of our time together.

They also include me in many of their plans. Since I moved in with them, I have traveled more than I have my whole life and seen places I only read

We traveled together nationally and internationally. And when she became ill, I returned to the small town where I grew up and looked after her until her death at 87. We had a wonderful final six years together.

My mother was obviously before her time. I'm sure many coming-out stories don't end this well, especially in Mississippi during the '60s (or today, for that matter). But it does go to show how well it can be handled and the benefits of handling it properly. Just wanted to share, Abby. – OUT AND PROUD IN LOUISIANA
DEAROUTANDPROUD:

Thank you for your heartwarming letter, which I am printing today, National Coming Out Day. It brought to mind a letter I published in 2007 from a woman who, to her regret, was very late to accept her gay son. Read on:

about in books. They never mention the fact that they are supporting me, or that I ignored them in the past.

When old friends ask how it feels living with my gay son, I tell them I hope they're lucky enough to have one who will take them in one day. Please continue urging your readers to accept their children as they are. My only regret is that I wasted 15 years.
– GRATEFUL MOM

DEARGRATEFULMOM:

You are indeed fortunate to have such a loving, generous and forgiving son. Thank you for pointing out how important it is that people respect one another for who they are, not for what we would like them to be. Sexual orientation is not a measure of anyone's humanity or worth.

You could have learned that lesson long ago had you and your husband contacted PFLAG when you first learned that Neil was gay. Among other things, the organization offers support groups and education for parents who need to learn more about LGBTQ issues. It can be contacted by going to pflag.org.