

## STUDY GUIDE FOR *A LOVE STORY—IN THE FACE OF HATE*

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Also available at <http://www.uua.org/re/curriculum/>

### **Description**

*A Love Story—In the Face of Hate*

Directed and produced by Suzanne Moe

Length: 38 minutes

Format: DVD

Copyright 2004 by SuMoe Productions

License is required for permission to show to groups of more than 10 and is available at [www.sumoe.com](http://www.sumoe.com). Fees are on a sliding scale and help share this story with others.

### **Background**

*A Love Story In The Face of Hate* chronicles the lives of Barbara & Tibby, two women who have shared nearly 40 years of love together. This couple has felt forced to leave the state of Virginia because of a new law that prohibits contracts between people of the same sex. This story puts a face on anti-gay laws and the far-reaching consequences of the oppression of same-sex couples.

Barbara and Tibby describe their lives, including their need to hide their relationship from virtually everyone for almost 30 years. Their story of life as “closeted” lesbians may be new to many people who are familiar with the more open life-styles of GLBT folks today. The first community in which they were able to “come out” was their Unitarian Universalist congregation, although only after some initial reluctance.

For the past 10 years, Tibby, a retired teacher, and Barbara, a psychotherapist and artist, have been able to share their lives and relationship much more openly, although still being careful about revealing their relationship at work. Nevertheless their lives as a couple and as parents were much like that of other families except that they had to create legal documents to cover situations that are automatically covered for their married heterosexual counterparts—legalities like medical directives, insurance coverage, property ownership, wills, etc. Contractual issues became especially important when Barbara discovered she had a life-threatening medical condition.

When the Commonwealth of Virginia passed a very restrictive anti-gay law in 2004 prohibiting contractual relationships between people of the same gender, all their work to protect their family became null and void. They had to leave their home state in order to protect their family.

The implications of this law are far-reaching because the vague language of the law can apply to any contractual relationship between two people of the same gender. Thus, *A Love Story—In the Face of Hate* is a story about human rights and civil liberties, not just gay and lesbian rights.

Since the DVD was made, there have been additional efforts by the supporters of the law to make it part of the Virginia constitution. At the same time, those who oppose the law are searching for an appropriate opportunity to challenge the law's constitutionality. For updates on this situation in Virginia, contact Equality Virginia at [www.equalityvirginia.org](http://www.equalityvirginia.org) or 804-643-4816.

### For the Facilitator

- Background reading:
  - *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, by Lillian Faderman (NY: Penguin Books, 1992.)
  - *Homophobia: How We all Pay the Price*, edited by Warren J. Blumenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.)
  - *A More Perfect Union: Why Straight America Must Stand Up for Gay Rights*, by Richard D. Mohr (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.)
  - *What Is Marriage For?* by E.J. Graff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999, 2004.)
- Have information available about the current legal situation relating to same sex couples in your state. The Human Rights Campaign website ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)) has information about state laws.
- Learn what some of the over 1,000 benefits of marriage are, such as: property rights, insurance and health benefits, hospital visitation rights, child custody, inheritance, joint bank accounts, etc.
- Visit [www.sumoe.com](http://www.sumoe.com) to list your showing of the film and to make arrangements for a license. They ask for a small fee, which can be reduced or waived depending on your budget. The fee helps make the DVD widely available. The web site also offers a number of downloadable resources, including recommended handouts to accompany the film:
  - A trifold informational brochure
  - 20 Things You Can Do to Advance the Struggle for Equality

- Suggested Ideas for a public screening of the DVD
- Sample licensing agreement
- Sample press release
- Promotional flier, with space to list your showing.
- Consider co-sponsoring your showing of the film with a local GLBT or human rights organization.
- Although it is possible to view and discuss the film in 90-minutes, a two-hour program is recommended.
- Be sure to test your equipment ahead of time to make sure it works properly. Watch the film at least once before showing it to a group. Familiarity will prepare you to lead the discussion following the showing.
- Begin the program with an introduction to the film and perhaps a opening reading. Possible readings include:
  - For more than two millennia in the West, antihomosexual laws and decrees have been enacted by both church and state, carrying punishments ranging from ridicule to the death of the ‘accused.’ These decrees have been used to justify the harsh treatment of those discovered or believed to have engaged in same-sex activity. But what is often forgotten or overlooked is the fact that these same laws have been used by individuals and governments to silence opponents, whether or not they have engaged in same-sex activity.

Warren J. Blumenfeld, *Homophobia: How We all Pay the Price*, p. 11

- What then is marriage? Marriage is intimacy given substance in the medium of everyday life, the day-to-day. Marriage is the fused intersection of love’s sanctity and necessity’s demand. ...

The ... vast array of legal rights and benefits of marriage ... fit this matrix of love and necessity—chiefly by promoting the patient tendance that such life requires (by providing for privacy, nurture, support, persistence) and by protecting against the occasions when necessity is cussed rather than opportune, especially when life is marked by crisis, illness and destruction.

Richard D. Mohr, *A More Perfect Union: Why Straight America Must Stand Up for Gay Rights*, pp. 41, 43

- *What is marriage for?* turns out to be a question about many things: about which families will be allies in trade and politics, which will rise and fall in the coming generation's economic competition; about the right use of the body and the meaning of sex; about which tribes count as political and social equals; about which child starves and which inherits a prospering farm; about sexual equality, about farm life versus urban capitalism, about feudalism, theocracy, democracy, and much, much more.

*What is marriage for*, in other words—like most serious political or social questions—is a question about what it means to be fully human.

E.J. Graff, *What Is Marriage For?* pp. 249-50

- We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:
  - The inherent worth and dignity of every person
  - Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
  - Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
  - A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
  - The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
  - The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
  - Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

UUA Principles and Purposes

### Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever known gay or lesbian people who were “in the closet” (keeping their sexual orientation secret)? What effect did being “in the closet” have on Barbara and Tibby?
2. When Tibby first joined a UU congregation, she kept her identity as a lesbian secret. What finally gave her the confidence to “come out”?
3. Is there some aspect of your life that you hide from most people? Why do you keep that part of yourself secret? Under what circumstances do you feel comfortable “coming out”?
4. When Tibby went to a psychiatrist to help her daughter adjust to her parents’ divorce, the psychiatrist reported Tibby’s lesbian relationship to Mormon Church officials. Why do you think the psychiatrist did this? Have you ever had an experience of betrayal by someone who was supposed to be helping you?

5. Tibby says it is “stunning” to her that people can be so cruel to children and families. What examples of “stunning cruelty” can you think of in your own life or community?
6. Because they could not legally marry, what steps did Barbara and Tibby take to protect themselves legally? Have you taken any similar steps to protect your family? Why or why not?
7. Why did Tibby and Barbara decide to leave their home state? What would you do in a similar situation?
8. How did Barbara’s health influence their decision to leave? What arrangements do you and your family have concerning medical issues? Do the laws of your state help or hinder your ability to care for your family?
9. How did HB 751 become law in Virginia? Have similar laws been passed in your state?
10. Tibby says: “I’m the most boringly moral person.” What does being a moral person mean to you?

### **Taking Action**

After your discussion, distribute and review the handout; “20 Things You Can Do to Advance the Struggle for Equality.” Ask participants which things they might want to do as individuals and which they could do best as a group.

# 20 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO ADVANCE THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY

P. O. B ox 7142 | Fredericksburg, VA | 22404 | U. S. A. | [sumoe@sumoe.com](mailto:sumoe@sumoe.com) | [www.sumoe.com](http://www.sumoe.com)

1. It's essential to believe in one's own inherent worth and dignity. That said, it is essential for GLBT individuals to release shame, and take the required life-enhancing steps OUT of the closet. It's dark in there! Step out to friends, to family, to co-workers, to community. NOW is the time.

2. It's essential to believe in one's own inherent worth and dignity. That said, it is essential for heterosexual individuals to courageously harness the privilege and step out to stand up for their GLBT loved ones who need support. Talk to friends, to family, to co-workers, to community. NOW is the time.

3. Inform yourself and others about the hateful and arguably unconstitutional law that went into effect in Virginia on 7/1/04: § 20-45.3 (Formerly known as HB 751) Civil unions between persons of same sex:

A civil union, partnership contract or other arrangement between persons of the same sex purporting to bestow the privileges or obligations of marriage is prohibited. Any such civil union, partnership contract or other arrangement entered into by persons of the same sex in another state or jurisdiction shall be void in all respects in Virginia and any contractual rights created thereby shall be void and unenforceable.

4. Don't let anyone say this law won't really take away civil rights. Explain that the language of this law is very broad and has room for many interpretations. It will be up to judges to enforce the law. Many judges are ultra-conservative and more are being appointed. Civil liberties are indeed in jeopardy.

5. Legislators in Virginia now plan to take §20-45.3 a step further by writing this discrimination into the state CONSTITUTION. Their intentions are to prohibit marriage equality, domestic partnerships, civil unions and other legal recognition for gay and lesbian couples (HJ586/SJ337). This proposed amendment passed both houses with strong majorities in February 2005.

In order to amend the constitution, an identical version of the proposed measure must pass in the 2006 session before going to a state-wide voter referendum, possibly in the fall of 2006. THERE IS MUCHWORK TO BE DONE! NOW is the time.

6. Develop a national awareness about the law (§ 20-45.3) and the proposed constitutional amendment (HJ586/SJ337). Email everyone in your address book. Spread the word beyond Virginia. Look what happened to the "Baggy Pants Bill" when it became an international joke! Make your notice short and sweet, and use your own heart-felt words, if possible.

7. Elected officials must hear from their constituents. Write to your state delegate/senator. You can email your delegate/senator directly by going to <http://legis.state.va.us> (Virginia). You can email your congressman/senator directly by going to [www.visi.com/juan/congress](http://www.visi.com/juan/congress) (National). Explain clearly what you'd like for him or her to support. Send thank yous when their vote is in support.

8. Don't wait until time for elections to inform voters. Get out the VOTE; locally, statewide, and nationally. Join like-minded efforts. NOW is the time.

9. Set up a showing of "A Love Story - In The Face of Hate." Use this tool to generate discussion: with friends in your home, or to a larger audience. If you want to set up a screening, visit [www.sumoe.com](http://www.sumoe.com) for help.

10. Get these issues before the public. City papers, for example, want information. Submit important events; movies, concerts, book reviews, news stories, etc.

11. Use the tools you have. There are many positive and inspirational stories to be told. Find your own "Rosa Parks" and record the story any way possible: in song, print, movie. NOW is the time.

12. Join and/or make a donation to 3 GLBT organizations: on the local, state and national levels. Contribute that which you are able to give: be it time or money. NOW is the time.

13. Promote symbols of justice and equality; put a sticker on your car, wear a ribbon. It's important to be seen and counted. If the rainbow sticker is too "out" for you, perhaps display the

HRC equal sign or the Equality Virginia logo. NOW is the time.

14. Don't let the Bible be used to demean GLBT existence. The Bible can, and has been, used to support many points of view. Over the years, much has been taken out of context and out of the time period. Here are a few examples: Slavery is permitted (Lev 25: 44-45). Non-virgin wives must be stoned to death (Deut 22: 13-24). Adulterers must be put to death (Lev 20:10). The aforementioned chapters also provide quotes that are often used against the GLBT. REFUTE the "abomination" quotes with other Biblical quotes. For more information, brochures are available from Metropolitan Community Church [www.ufmcc.com](http://www.ufmcc.com).

15. Speak up when you hear homophobic slurs and jokes. Simply say "it offends me when you speak that way" or, "those type of words are really hurtful to me." Tell what it does to YOU instead of putting the speaker on the defensive with a comment like "you are so full of hate."

16. Give the *Love Story*... DVD as a gift. Allow it to serve as a tool to inform, educate and activate. There are a lot of folks who care about human rights but are simply unaware of what is at stake.

17. Write a letter to the editor of your newspaper.

18. Don't forget the GLBT YOUTH. We must be aware of, and incorporate their needs in the struggle for equality. The youth are our future.

19. Ask your employer about health insurance for domestic partners. Never hurts to politely inquire. Put the issue in the forefront. NOW is the time.

20. To everyone, but especially GLBT couples, as best you can, get your papers in order, regardless of the law. Make sure these documents are in order if you are in a committed relationship: wills, deeds, powers of attorney, medical directives, even funeral arrangements. NOW is the time.