

MOTHER LEARNS LATE IN LIFE TO ACCEPT GAY SON AS HE IS

By Abigail Van Buren

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DEAR ABBY: My husband and I raised our 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.

When I was 74, 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 turned me down. Feeling unwanted, I wanted to die.

When Neil and Ron heard what had happened, they invited me to move across 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 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

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

You could have learned that lesson long ago, had you and your husband contacted Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (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 gender issues. (The address is 1726 M St. N.W., Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20036.)