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## The roots of '8: The Mormon Proposition'

Co-director Reed Cowan and other participants have a lot invested — financially and emotionally — in the documentary on the church's efforts to pass California's ban on same-sex marriage.

June 21, 2010 | By Amy Kaufman, Los Angeles Times

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Linda Stay, a fifth-generation Mormon who has since left the church, loves her son. He's gay and married his husband two years ago in San Francisco during the brief period when same-sex marriage was legal.

### FOR THE RECORD:

"8: The Mormon Proposition": An article in Monday's Calendar section about the documentary "8: The Mormon Proposition" said Reed Cowan was the film's co-director. He is the film's director. —

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So when an e-mail popped up in Stay's inbox last year from a filmmaker looking to interview those who had been affected by Proposition 8 — the same-sex marriage ban voted into California law in fall 2008 — she raised her hand. She supported her son and wanted to share the story of how her family had been torn apart over his sexual orientation. But she didn't think the decision to participate in a documentary would fray her relationships in the Mormon community — and with her own straight children — further.

"I don't think we realized, honestly, what the film would mean and what it would do — the consequences of it," said Stay, trying to stifle tears during a recent visit to Los Angeles from her home in St. George, Utah. "Would I go back? We've certainly sacrificed a lot for this film, a lot of relationships."

Her husband, Steve, took her hand and smiled.

"We kind of figured if they were sacrificed, they weren't much of a relationship in the first place."

The controversial film the Stays are a part of is "8: The Mormon Proposition," a documentary that argues that the Mormon Church, as a nonprofit religious organization, breached the barrier between church and state in its successful campaign to pass Prop. 8. The movie, released in theaters Friday, is also available on demand and through digital download channels. (Its release is especially timely, because last week a federal judge heard closing arguments in a lawsuit questioning the proposition's constitutionality.)

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In the documentary, internal church documents and interviews with former Mormons are used to give the story context. But its emotional grounding lies in the stories of Mormon families and gay individuals who have been personally affected by the church's position.

The film's co-director and writer is Reed Cowan, 37, a Miami journalist who grew up in "one of the staunchest Mormon families you can be raised by." Though he knew he was gay, he married a woman after graduating from Utah State University. When their relationship began to crumble, Cowan thought of his then-2-year-old son.

"I said, 'I'm going to quit this fight. I'm not going to be a liar anymore. I'm not going to have a child that's raised by a liar,'" he recalled by telephone, explaining his decision to come out publicly to his friends and family.

At the time, he was a morning anchor for the ABC affiliate in Utah City, but shortly after revealing his sexual orientation, he found himself demoted. In his new role as a reporter, he was sent out one day on an assignment to cover a story about a boy who had been killed in a freak swing set accident.

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It was his son.

That prompted Cowan to launch his filmmaking career, with a decision to "turn his pain into purpose" by building schools in Kenya and shooting a documentary about it. For his second film, Cowan initially intended to focus on gay homeless teens in Utah. But as did research, he

was approached by a man he refers to as his "Mormon Deep Throat," a gay man who had worked in the archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and had uncovered documents detailing the church's strategy for using the ballot box to stop gay marriage.

That documents revealed how, in a 1998 campaign in Hawaii, the Mormon Church helped to stop same-sex marriage through inconspicuous association with other denominations, such as Roman Catholics. The experience laid the groundwork for the Prop. 8 battle, during which many Mormons were encouraged to make donations to the California campaign, some of which, the film contends, were hidden. Consequently, the amount of money the Mormon Church contributed to the campaign was underreported, the movie argues.

The church's tactics and the animosity toward gays, Cowan said, were distressing.

"It broke my heart," he said. "You like to think that maybe they just misunderstand you — that maybe someday these men of God will be able to look you in the eye and see a human being. What shocked me is that they consider this a Holy War. They're cavalier, and they're calculated."

Michael Purdy, a spokesman for the Mormon Church, fired back when asked for comment on the film.

"We have not seen '8: The Mormon Proposition.' However, judging from the trailer and background material online, it appears that accuracy and truth are rare commodities in this film. Clearly, anyone looking for balance and thoughtful discussion of a serious topic will need to look elsewhere," Purdy said in a statement.

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