



## The Cost of Silence and Secrecy By Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA

An Interview with Rev. Naomi Stevenson and her daughter Ruth

August 28 at Sawmill Creek Resort, Huron, Ohio

(Even here, in this true interview, the names used in this story are fictional. True names could not be used for fear of reprisals. The silence is costly.)

I met Naomi at breakfast at *Sing a New Song*. We had gathered early to have breakfast, hear some inspirational words from Rev. Bishop Judith Craig and then to share responses to those words as they reflect on our personal lives. It was there that Naomi revealed that she, like four others at the table and like so many others at *Sing a New Song*, has a child condemned by the United Methodist church as “incompatible with Christian teaching.” She shared the pain of secrecy and isolation, preventing her, a gifted pastor from living authentically in her own church and even in her own extended family. She told of having to keep secrets to keep her job, of her daughter’s alienation from the church, but of personal growth as well.

Naomi’s daughter Ruth spent a lot of time in high school in prayer, fighting with herself, trying to come to terms with the suspicion that she was lesbian. She dated a little in high school, trying to be like her girlfriends, trying to prove that suspicion wrong. It was not until 2005, just after she had returned from 2 ½ years of Peace Corps service in the Republic of Georgia, that she finally came to terms herself with her sexuality and wrote a letter to her family saying “I date women...”

Caught completely by surprise, Naomi and her husband did what most parents do when presented with hearing that one’s child is gay: They cry. They cry a lot. They pray. They ask over and over again “what did I do...or not do... to cause this?” They think this is just a phase and will pass. They try to figure out who abused their child. But mostly, they keep the secret tightly held. Because this news came so shortly after Ruth’s return from the Peace Corps service, both mother and father feared that very stressful events occurring in the Peace Corps were responsible.

Still struggling with the conflict of her understanding of Biblical teachings about homosexuality, Naomi and her husband quietly told Ruth’s brothers and sisters, but not Ruth’s maternal grandparents, fearing their condemnation. Ruth’s family has grown to accept, even love Susan, Ruth’s girlfriend of 6 years, but the couple dares not attend family events with grandparents present.

Lacking access to a supportive church family or even a nearby PFLAG group, this family has felt isolation. Naomi tried to garner support from her DS, but was brushed off and referred to a retired DS, who put on her personnel file “has a lesbian daughter”. With no reconciling UMC congregation closer than 2 hours drive away, Ruth and Susan have searched for a welcoming church family,

but so far have not found one.

“I’m very proud of Ruth,” says Naomi. She recalled a story of Ruth’s courageous, quick and level-headed action in Georgia when Ruth literally saved the life

**My child is in my church, but I can’t share who she is fully.**

of a newborn baby with congenital heart disease by deftly applying CPR. “My child is in my church, but I can’t share who she is fully. I can’t share the hurt that my own child is feeling because of her denomination’s rejection. Why is this happening to my family?” laments Naomi.

Naomi and her daughter came to *Sing a New Song* together, after Naomi received a flyer about the gathering at a clergy women’s retreat. “It’s a gift,” says Naomi. “I would not be here at *Sing a New Song* without having received this

gift, my daughter. This gift has made me a better person.



Then Naomi quickly adds, “Here I am, clergy. What am I going to do about it?”

## PRN ACTIVE AT ANNUAL CONFERENCES

By Robert Swing

**M**embers of your Steering Committee (SC) were busy in their Annual Conferences this summer. Seven of our team served as lay-members of their Annual Conferences, others attended to provide a reconciling presence. Two of them were nominated (not elected) as General Conference Delegates.

Many petitions/resolutions were submitted by SC members. A significant number were accepted in the Oregon, Minnesota, New York, and Nebraska Conferences. I am sure that many of you readers could add your similar experiences. A petition previously declared "out of order," and appealed to the Judicial Council (ruled out of their jurisdiction) was re-voted and passed.

The move by clergy to sign statements regarding marriage and civil unions was much more prominent that I have seem reported elsewhere. In the Northern IL Annual Conference, the final count of pastors who signed on was just shy of 200 (they're still trying to make 200!) and every single delegate supported by RMN was voted in.

*(Continued on page 7)*

**G**reetings! My name is David Braden, and I am the new Director of Development at RMN. Before joining RMN, I served as the Manager of Foundation Relations at the Chicago-based nonprofit,

Interfaith Youth Core. I received my M.A. in Social Work from the School of Social Service Administration at The University of Chicago and B.A. in International Studies from DePaul University. I am a lifelong United Methodist and member



of Holy Covenant UMC in Chicago. I also serve as a director for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and as chair of its Committee on Racial and Ethnic Concerns.

As a part of my new role, I serve as member of the Parents Steering Committee and I am thrilled to be a part of the team!

I consider myself blessed to have parents who responded with love and support when I came out to them as a gay man my sophomore year of high school. Having their support

was critical at a time in my life when I wasn't feeling great about myself and needed their love more than ever. It is an honor and privilege to work with parents who extend their unconditional love not only to their own queer children but to The United Methodist Church and their efforts to make it a more welcoming place for all people.

## Parents Steering Committee

The following members of the Parents Steering Committee direct the activities of the Parents Reconciling Network (PRN), an extension ministry of Reconciling Ministries Network. PRN is dedicated to bringing the voice of parents of GLBTQI children (young and adult) to the movement. The Steering Committee meets at a central location once or twice yearly. Additionally, it conducts 2-hour conference calls 3-4 times yearly in between regular meetings. Otherwise, phone calls and frequent E-Mails keep them working year round for PRN.

**Steering Committee Members:**

Helen Andrew, Memorial UMC, White Plains, NY—Recording Secretary, and Reconciling Stoles Chair  
Blair Barbour, Euclid UMC, Oak Park, IL  
David Braden, Chicago, IL—RMN Staff Member  
Faith Buss, Richfield UMC, Minneapolis, MN—Financial Sec.  
Barbara Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC  
Vernell Carter, Foundry UMC, Washington DC  
Rev. Jim Evans, UMC Fort Wayne, IN

Faith Geer, St Paul's UMC, —newest member  
Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, OR  
Bob Swing, First UMC, Oak Ridge, TN—PRN SC Chair  
Joy Watt, Uniontown UMC, Uniontown, OH  
Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle, WA—Newsletter Editor

As you can see, there are large areas of the country not represented on this steering committee. If you know of a United Methodist parent (or other family member) of a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer person who might like to contribute to this work, please contact Bob Swing ([rjswing@tds.net](mailto:rjswing@tds.net) or 865-777-4668).

**Advisory Group:**

Paul and Betty Beeman, Des Moines, WA  
Bob and Betty Dorr, Omaha NE  
Larry Fox, Freeland, WA  
Helen King, Lake Junaluska, NC  
John and Linda Lewis, Great Falls, MT  
Jerry Longwell, Southlake, TX  
Margaret Mallory, Toledo, OH



## GLBT-Friendly Books For 6-11 Year Olds

by Joy Watts, Uniontown, Ohio

It is not always easy to find GLBT-friendly books for the 6 to 11 year old age group. This list includes books culled from recommendations I found on the internet and some suggestions from RMN friends. I enjoyed reading many of these! If you find a great book, let me know at [joyt-watts@sbcglobal.net](mailto:joyt-watts@sbcglobal.net). Interestingly, during Banned Books Week, I read that two of these children's books made the list of "Top Ten Most Frequently Challenged Books." From 2006-2010, *And Tango Makes Three* was the number one most challenged, except for 2009 when it was only second! *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* was in the top 10 in 2008. Let's be sure they continue to be read.

*And Tango Makes Three*

by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, 2005, ages 4 and up.

A fun, adorable picture book and true story about two male penguins who are determined to hatch an egg and raise a penguin chick and be a family. It is highly recommended by many RMN folks! Adults love it too.

*My Princess Boy*

by Cheryl Kilodavis, 2011, ages 3-7.

A mom's story about her son, who loves the color pink, things that sparkle, and wearing dresses. A charmingly illustrated story about uniqueness, unconditional love and a call for acceptance.

*Lucy Goes to the Country*

by Joseph Kennedy, 1998, ages 3-8.

Madcap adventures ensue when a gay couple and their cat spend the weekend in the country.

*Uncle Bobby's Wedding*

by Sarah S. Brannen, 2008, ages 5-8.

A charming picture book with a message of love and tolerance. Little Chloe never questions that her favorite uncle could marry his male friend Jamie, she only worries that she won't continue to be as special in his life. The characters are illustrated as cute, furry guinea pigs.

*My Two Uncles*

by Judith Vigna, 1995, ages 4-10.

A young girl describes her close relationship with her uncle and his partner and is sad when the partner is excluded from family celebrations. A slight change ensues.

*Zack's Story—Growing Up With Same Sex Parents*

by Keith Elliot Greenburg, 1996, ages 5-9+.

Many photos and the words of an 11 year old boy tell about his full and well-rounded life as part of his family with lesbian parents.

*Families*

by Susan Kuklin, 2006, ages 7-11.

In funny, frank and sometimes surprising interviews, children from 15 different sorts of families talk about the love they share and how they identify themselves as and in the family. Includes positive gay and lesbian families as well as different races, ethnic groups and religions. Great photography.

*It's So Amazing—A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Families*

by Robie H. Harris, 1999 and 2009 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, ages 7-11.

A facts of life and where-babies-come-from sort of book, that includes homosexuality without any negative inferences.

*The Skull of Truth*

by Bruce Coville, 1907, ages 8-12.

A fantasy about a boy named Charlie who finds a skull which compels people to tell the truth. In a minor subplot, Charlie's favorite uncle must reveal his "roommate" is actually his boyfriend and we see how Charlie reacts.

*From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*

by Jacqueline Woodson, 1995, ages 11-15.

A frank, perceptive novel about an adolescent African-American boy who has to deal with differences, racism, and a mom who reveals she is lesbian and in love with a white woman.



## The Key to Authenticity

By Lorena Cory, First United Methodist Church,  
Arlington Heights, Illinois

**M**y child was born with a key. Even in-utero she was purposeful. I had excitedly prepared myself for a natural labor; however, near the end of the pregnancy, she chose a frank breech position and then stayed put despite my desperate attempts to get her to face down. She was born by a planned C-section and came screaming into the world. I now joke that if I would have known how determined she was back then I wouldn't even have tried to get her to switch positions.

I asked the doctor to make a big announcement about the gender since I had left it a surprise. He happily announced that I had a son. We all celebrated the birth of a boy as that was our understanding at the time.

However, at two years old she asked me one night, "Why did God make me a boy?" It was the beginning of an endless array of questions and affirmations which would transform all of our lives. By three years old she would only wear girls' shoes. Any teasing by other kids was met with a shrug of her shoulders. By four she was asking me if she could grow up and become a woman. In public everyone assumed she was a girl because of her clothing and her car-

riage. I asked her if she wanted me to correct people and she said no. I became a student of gender identity and perception. Her male name was initials so that made it easy for her to pass as a girl. She actually participated in a couple of park district classes where she was perceived as a girl for the entire class. She loved it. In first grade she starting using the nurse's unisex restroom at school because she felt uncomfortable in the boys' restroom and she got teased while she was in there. By second grade she had grown her hair quite long and at the end of the year she got her ears pierced. It was then that she told me she wanted a feminine name and she wanted to go to third grade as a girl.

We started her social transition during the summer and she wore a girl's swim skirt to the pool. Family, friends and neighbors lovingly accepted her requests and many commented on how she never seemed happier. We attended a gender conference and came home armed with resources and contacts. Transcending the gender norm liberated us. We created a support group and a network of friends to walk with on our journey. We learned to live our

truth.

So many people put themselves in psychological jail and then society locks the door. Yet, I see the shackles of closed mindedness being broken open all around us. My child has freely been herself since the very beginning. She kept claiming herself at every turn. I know this firsthand because I witnessed it, and the process has freed me. I no longer

take anyone or anything at face value. Even her brother and sister are growing up with the gift of radical acceptance. Her courage has helped everyone around her claim their own. I never would have imagined that my eight year old would wind up being my greatest teacher. She nonchalantly reminded me recently, "I'm still the same kid." She carries the key of authenticity.

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perception.**



## My grandson's baptism...

By Carolyn Pennington, Wesley UMC, Eugene, Oregon



Imagine, an energetic 21-month-old boy who wakes up on Sunday morning to find all of his grandparents and favorite cousins in the house. With plenty of excitement, morning tasks are completed and the whole group is off to church.

His moms have invited the entire congregation and lots of friends and family for this special day of celebrating both his baptism and recently finalized adoption. He even gets a quick preview of his ELMO cake! Next, it is upstairs to the sanctuary with lots of time for running through the aisles as everyone prepares for this most special of days.

The service begins and he is expected to sit still until "his" time.

Not easy! Now up to the front with his moms, grandparents and God-mother. The pastor speaks and there are lots of wiggles and passing through arms. Finally, he is passed into the pastor's arms. She is a petite woman and a great friend of the family. He is a large, strong, excited boy.

Holding him in one arm the pastor says "I baptize you in the name of the Father" and the holy water comes. 'No way' he decides and two arms shoot up and throw that strange, dripping handful of water away. She tries again, "and in the

name of the Son". 'Really strange' he must think and again two arms throw the dripping hand away. Here she comes with water again "and in the name of the Holy Spirit". 'Oh' he seems to realize, 'you want me to get wet'! With one quick lunge and both hands splashing excitedly, he goes head first he goes into the baptismal font.

Truly Water Washed and Spirit Born!

## Seeking Stole-makers for General Conference

The Parents' Reconciling Network is looking for volunteers to make reconciling stoles for General Conference 2012. We plan to have 2,000 people (delegates and volunteers) witnessing to God's inclusive love by wearing these rainbow stoles in Tampa. However, this means we need many faithful stitchers working over the next six months.

The pattern and instructions for making the stoles may be found on the PRN link on the RMN website, as well as the history of the stole project. (Go to RMNetwork.org, click on "Parents' Reconciling Ministries" under "Extension Ministries", go to the bottom of that page and click on "Pattern for PRN stoles). We will ship the fabric to you.

We are asking that the stoles be made in multiples of ten (10, 20.....100) to facilitate the

shipment of fabric and the cost of postage. It takes approximately 5 hours to make 10 stoles if you are working alone—less time and more fun if you gather a group to mass produce them. The deadline for returning the stoles will be April 1, 2012.

If you are able to help, please e-mail Helen Andrew ([Helen@ldandrew.com](mailto:Helen@ldandrew.com)), noting your name, address, email address and how many stoles you are willing to make. Also,

please note whether you were able to access the pattern and instructions from the website. If not, we will mail them with the fabric.



The fabric we are using for General Conference is the same as was used for Sing a New Song—so, if you have a stole from SANS and will be attending GC, please bring your stole with you.

## Why We Give to RMN

by Carol and Jeff Waymack, Woodland Park, UMC, Seattle

(We share this true story from an anonymous source with names changed to protect the privacy of those in the story.)

*Picture this: It's 2009. On a lovely, warm July day at Point Orford Park, our daughter Kendra married her love, Amy and our son Jackson was the Man of Honor. This event was a wedding in every respect... flowers, family, friends, dancing, toasting, Amy in a white dress and Kendra in a white suit. It was wonderful to feel the love of all those around us, most of whom were attending their first gay wedding.*

*At the end of 2008, however, Kendra told us that she was to become our second son. Over the next year, Kendra gradually transitioned to Kenneth.*

*After Kenneth's coming out to us on Christmas Eve, we initially told no one. 2009 was a year of learning and of many "coming outs", the very first at a local RMN meeting, and, little by little, guardedly to family, friends and coworkers.*

*By 2011, we had another family wedding to plan, the wedding of our other son Jackson to his fiancée, Pamela. As planning progressed, I noted to Jackson that Kenneth's name was on the list of groomsmen. What part was Kenneth to have in the wedding? Was he not going to be a best man or a groomsman?*

*"No," said Jackson*

*"And why not? This is your twin."*

*"Because it's so complicated---what will all the relatives think? What will my other groomsmen think?" said Jackson.*

*Oh, my heart broke. We discussed how important it was to model an attitude of*

*acceptance and love and family and...I said, it's all right to ask others to suffer a bit of discomfort for what is based on love and family and acceptance. This is your twin, the one you have known forever. What courage from Kenneth and what love from Jackson to make room for a newly transitioned brother to go for tux fittings, go to a bachelor party and hang out with the other groomsmen before the wedding service!*

*Fast forward to a lovely, warm July day in 2011 in Eatonville. And there we were at a wedding again. This event was a wedding in every respect...flowers, family, friends, dancing, toasting, Pamela in a white dress and Jackson in a dark tux. All family members were present—from both groom's and bride's side. Kenneth, one of the groomsmen, walked me down the aisle and then escorted one of the bridesmaids. It was wonderful to feel the love of all those around us. And I never heard anything but words of love from anyone, most of whom were attending for the first time a wedding with a transgender member of the wedding party.*

We identify with this family. We recall well what we dealt with as parents of a transgender child. We recall the wonderful support we received thru RMN, thru Convos, local events, and innumerable personal conversations.

Involvement with RMN has meant many things to us. We helped our church become Reconciling in 2002. We are active in the local AC RMN. Jeff chaired our annual statewide RMN Gathering in 2009 called "Don't Box Me In." On the PRN Steering Committee, I presented a program about transgender and intersex to

the SC and at the Sing a New Song PRN pre-day forum, a program on the biology of sex and gender.

I have to tell you, nowhere else in my life have I encountered so many authentic people. Dealing constructively with other supportive people around issues of who you are inside and who and what is family strips away all the superficiality, pretension and masking. What is left is genuine love. Sharing this struggle with others who have been on a similar journey bonds us in a way few other experiences do.

We have tried to share generously with RMN at all levels because we can, and because this organization saved us, continues to save lives and is trying to save the church we love. Now that the personal struggles in our family have quieted down, I view issues of full inclusion as the civil rights issue our time. I do not want to look back and say I wish I had done more to be on the right side of history.

Please join Jeff and me in supporting the work of PRN by making a financial contribution today. Your gift connects parents and families with a network of support rooted in our United Methodist tradition of love and inclusion. Send your check payable to Parents Reconciling Network in your own envelope. You can also contact David Braden, Director of Development, at the RMN office with other ways to give ([david@rmnetwork.org](mailto:david@rmnetwork.org); 773-736-5526). Thank you for your consideration and support.



(Continued from page 3)

Be Who You Are

by Jennifer Carr, 2010-2011, for children, parents and teachers.



This book was written to open minds and hearts to the concept of children who do not identify with their birth gender. It tells the story of the family's support after their son has announced he feels like a girl inside. Well written and illustrated!

Antonio's Card/La Tarjeta

de Antonio by Rigoberto Gonzalez, 2005, ages 5-8, each page in both English and Spanish.



Antonio makes a beautiful Mother's Day card for his mother and her partner, Leslie, but should he take Leslie inside the school where his card is on display? His classmates have made fun of Leslie, an artist who wears paint-splattered overalls, by saying that she looks like a guy, a rodeo clown, and like crayons exploded all over her. Antonio must choose whether—or how—to express his love for his family.

(Continued from page 2)

SC Members report significant involvement in their Annual conferences:

- Sponsoring coffee houses
- Hosting large progressive gatherings where 2 minute stories were shared
- "stoling" conferences marshals and delegates
- Setting up display tables at Ministry Fairs
- Leading a balloon parade, and more.

We encourage all Reconciling United Methodists to be active in their congregations, and conferences and not to hesitate to submit resolutions and petitions even if "the odds are against you." (See UMC Book of Discipline - ¶ 507) The dialogue then continues.

You may view the petitions submitted by members of the Steering Committee of Parents Reconciling Network on behalf of all United Methodist parents of GLBT children at [RMNetwork.org](http://RMNetwork.org).

Look under "Extension Ministries"

Help keep these inspiring stories coming to you by making a donation today to the Parents Reconciling Network.

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Send donations to: Parents Reconciling Network, c/o Reconciling Ministries Network, 3801 N Keeler Ave Fl 3, Chicago IL 60641  
 Reconciling Ministries Network is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. Your donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

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**NAME THE STOLE CONTEST**

PRN has collected stoles from GC, Convos, and ACs over the years and have displayed them various places. Each stole is identified with a "cloud and event" name on its front. Except for a few depicted below.

We would like to invite you to help us identify the source/event these appeared in. Your reward = just the satisfaction of sharing the information with others and we will share your name in the next newsletter. Send your identifications to Bob at [rjswing@tds.net](mailto:rjswing@tds.net). Thanks!!!!

