

**Interweaving Queer Individuals,  
Queer Communities, and Allies  
by the Rev. Ann Schranz  
Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation  
February 15, 2009**

I have known amazing weavers, weavers who combine exquisite artistry with careful attention to detail. My personal interest in weaving is more utilitarian than artistic. I want to know how to darn a sock.

Fortunately, there is a website entitled “Learn2 Darn a Sock.” There we find this proclamation: “Everyone has a favorite pair of socks--has yours been tucked away because of a hole in it? Let go of your shame--just grab a needle, thread and a favorite sock that needs darning, and in less than 30 minutes your sock will be ready to wear again! And don't be surprised if you derive considerable pleasure from this activity. Apart from the joy of rehabilitating an old pair of sock-friends, this simple type of sewing has pleasant and rhythmic motion that originated thousands of years ago.”<sup>1</sup>

It is best to repair a worn sock while a lattice of threads still connects the sides of the worn area. It is more difficult to darn a sock when it has an unmistakable hole in it. So it is with frayed human relationships. It is best to repair tattered human relationships when a lattice of threads still connects us. It is more difficult when there is an unmistakable gulf between us. Do not wait until a relationship is broken before attempting to repair it.

There is much to repair in frayed relationships among individuals, and there is much to repair in our tattered social safety net. Each of us must learn to weave and to patch. We must learn to “interweave” – to strengthen the connections on all sides of a tear. In just a moment I will talk about highlights of yesterday’s gathering of Interweave Continental, which took place this year at Pacific Unitarian Church in Rancho Palos Verdes. Interweave Continental is a Unitarian Universalist membership organization actively working toward ending oppression based on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.tutorials.com/06/0632/0632.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.interweavecontinental.org>

Before I talk about Interweave highlights, I want to focus on a topic that is seldom discussed in Unitarian Universalist congregations: what it is like for straight spouses and families when a parent “comes out” as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Amity Pierce Buxton talked with over 1,000 spouses and family members over eight years to understand what the coming-out crisis means to the family and to the larger community. She founded the Straight Spouse Network in 1991, and she wrote *The Other Side of the Closet: The Coming-Out Crisis for Straight Spouses and Families*.<sup>3</sup>

Amity Pierce Buxton writes, “The straight spouses’ experience affords us a look behind the headlines that too often present gay rights issues in pro- or anti-gay extremes. As members of the mainstream who are also intimately involved with gay, lesbian or bisexual partners, spouses know firsthand both sides of the controversy, from militant gay activism to oppressive homophobia.”<sup>4</sup> She notes, “While the partner’s integrity is affirmed in the coming out, the spouse’s integrity is shattered.”<sup>5</sup> “[A therapist] describes how a gay husband often reacts to an angry wife. ‘She is accused of homophobia, being crazy, overreactive, hysterical, and unreasonable. Her dilemma is discounted in preference to his.’”<sup>6</sup>

Straight Spouse Network volunteers put straight spouses and partners in touch with one another and provide resources to help them cope constructively with whatever combination of these matters pertains to their situation: their partner's sexual orientation; a non-traditional marital relationship; shock, hurt, anger, self-blame; sexual rejection and mismatch; deception and betrayal issues; AIDS, STD's, or other health issues; deception, distrust, and confusion; effects on children and relatives; their own crisis of identity; powerlessness and grief; and loss of meaning in their lives.

For most, but not all “mixed orientation” couples (that is, couples where one spouse is straight, and the other spouse is gay, lesbian, or bisexual), a marriage ends in divorce. However, Amity

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Other Side of the Closet: The Coming Out Crisis for Straight Spouses and Families*, Amity Pierce Buxton, Ph.D., John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1994. See [www.straightspouse.org](http://www.straightspouse.org).

<sup>4</sup> Page 316

<sup>5</sup> Page 176.

<sup>6</sup> Page 206

Pierce Buxton notes that “Couples who are able to preserve their marriages share the following attitudes: the straight spouse accepts the partner’s sexual orientation, the partner values the spouse as the primary relationship, and they both hold a non-traditional view of marriage that they have defined together.”<sup>7</sup>

I rejoice that some *allies* of queer individuals and queer communities are straight spouses whose world fell apart when their partner “came out.” They deserve our deep respect. It often takes several years of difficult inner work (with the help of outside support) for them to become active allies. “Over a fourth of the spouses studied in depth for this book turned to some kind of spiritual realm to help them come to terms with their own disorientation.”<sup>8</sup> Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation is a hospitable place for the disoriented – whatever the cause of the disorientation.

There are not a sufficient number of hospitable places in the world. We need additional hospitable places, and we can create them together. The annual Convocation (or Convo) of Interweave is a hospitable place. Yesterday, Don Cavanaugh was recognized for attending his 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Interweave Convo in the past 23 years. One year the weather was terrible at the location of the hosting congregation; Don had an “excused absence.” ;) I don’t know his age, but Don said that he recently attended his 50<sup>th</sup> high school class reunion.

I said, “Don, what motivated you to attend Convo so regularly?” “The obvious,” he said, “seeing old friends, and I was getting into a rut.” “You mean that your life was in a rut and you came to Convo for a change of pace?” “No. I was in the rut of coming to Convo every year.” ;) “Don, what was your best Convo?” “Edmonton, Canada in February 1994. I had just had open heart surgery in January, and no one expected me to be there. After the surgery, I asked my doctor if I could go cross country in February. ‘Cross country skiing?’ he asked, and he did not sound very optimistic. ‘No, cross country in an airplane.’”

---

<sup>7</sup> Page 84

<sup>8</sup> Page 168

Last night at Convo, the keynote address was delivered by the Rev. Troy Perry, founder of Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). His father was Pentecostal, and his mother was Southern Baptist (another kind of “mixed marriage,” he said). In the late 1970’s, Rev. Perry went to General Assembly to honor the Unitarian Universalist Association for its work on gay and lesbian issues. He began his remarks by telling hackneyed Unitarian Universalist jokes, and he was booed after his first two jokes.

Then he told a true story about the Metropolitan Community Church in Anchorage, Alaska. As was then true in many places in the country, the MCC church was having a hard time finding space to rent in which to hold its church services. Metropolitan Community Church members went before the Board of the Unitarian Universalist church and asked to rent the building. The Board asked what kind of a group MCC was. “We are gay Christians.” “What?!” said a Board member. They repeated, “We are gay Christians.” “Well,” said the Board member, “I understand the gay part, but what’s this Christian [crap]?”

At General Assembly in the late 1970’s the audience roared. Last night at Convo, the two dozen of us in the room laughed heartily. Later that night, as I was driving home, the bittersweet sadness of that moment became more clear to me. It is not OK to laugh at Christians or to make fun of Christianity.

Rev. Perry said that queer people need three things: hope, healing, and heaven. HOPE -- Rev. Perry and his partner, Philip, traveled to South Africa, where Metropolitan Community Church is establishing new churches. They met with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said, “You need to go to Robbings Island, where Nelson Mandela was held for 27 years. The conditions in prison were such that you slept on a 1” mattress if you were Black, you slept on a 2” mattress if you were “Colored,” and you slept on a bed if you were White. What gave Nelson Mandela hope? His three white jailors. They knew he was imprisoned unjustly. They looked the other way when he slipped notes to the ANC (African National Congress).

HEALING –Rev. Perry once put a lover on a pedestal. When the relationship ended, he was so distraught that he slit both wrists. In the hospital, doctor asked, “Do I have to keep you here for

72 hours or are you going to be OK?” “Doctor, what do you think?” “You must choose whether to live or to die. You have to make the choice to be OK. No one can make that choice for you.” “I will be OK.” In the hospital, Rev. Perry had a mystical experience. In the still small voice inside himself, he heard God say, “I love you. You are my son, and I don’t have any step-sons or step-daughters.”

The first gathering of Metropolitan Community Church took place on October 6, 1968 with twelve people in his living room. Recorded music from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir was played, and everyone sang along with the recording. It is ironic that the Mormons played this role in the start of MCC.

HEALING – In the end, death is a great healer, Rev. Perry said. His mother lived in his house for 18 years. They were very close and often traveled together. As she was dying of cancer, with her sons around her, she said, “If I’ve ever hurt you, I want to ask for forgiveness.” After his mother died, he did not stop crying for three months. The tears stopped after he had a daydream or vision about his mother. During her lifetime, his mother had diabetes and did not always eat the right things. If she ate the wrong things, she might say, “Just jack up the insulin.” Her diet was a source of contention between them. In the vision, his mother was looking beautiful and ate three gumdrops. “Won’t that hurt you?” She responded, “I don’t have diabetes any more.” Death can be healing.

HEAVEN -- Heaven is in this life, he said. Heaven is doing the right things for *all of us*. An MCC member with an Episcopalian background would help Rev. Perry dress in vestments of the right color for the time of year. Right before Rev. Perry processed into the sanctuary, this man would joke, “Give ‘em hell!” He would say “No, I’m not going to give ‘em hell. I’m going to give ‘em heaven.”

Does that sound familiar? Universalist John Murray (who was born in 1741 and died in 1815 said, “You may possess only a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them not Hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach the

kindness and everlasting love of God.”<sup>9</sup>

More and more straight people are attending Metropolitan Community Church. Often they start attending in a show of solidarity with queer friends or family members. They stay because they are spiritually fed. Interweaving of queer individuals, queer communities, and allies happens in MCC congregations, as well as in Unitarian Universalist congregations, United Church of Christ congregations, and elsewhere, thank goodness.

Interweaving is a matter of placing our individual joys and sorrows into a larger context. Interweaving means taking in more of reality. Interweaving means appreciating individual threads (individual lives) and also the larger patterns of life. I conclude with an observation by Amity Pierce Buxton. A person in crisis must come to terms with his or her pain. “To achieve this many spouses find it helpful to view their crisis from a larger perspective. In this context the pain no longer seems unique and can be seen as an example of the suffering inherent in the human condition. Spouses are not alone in their hurt. Unrequited love and betrayal fill the pages of history. The goal is to stop seeing the coming-out trauma as a gay versus straight conflict but rather as a universal paradox. The truth that frees one person may hurt the other. Hurt and love coexist in life.”<sup>10</sup>

On this day after Valentine’s Day, may we acknowledge that hurt and love coexist in life. “May we who are gathered here be empowered by that love to weave new patterns of Truth and Justice into a web of life that is strong, beautiful, and everlasting.”<sup>11</sup> May it be so!

---

<sup>9</sup> See <http://nyscu.org/quotes.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> Page 258

<sup>11</sup> This reading by Barbara Wells is #431 in *Singing the Living Tradition*. These were the chalice lighting words earlier in the service.