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Telling Our Stories.

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Telling our Stories. Or Why Transformation Stories Are Important.

by [Gilbert Rossing](#)

The TV ad below tells our story, just a snip of our story. It is told in 75 words and 30 seconds. Nevertheless, it is an important story, a story that must be heard.

Our story is important because it is more than our story alone. It is a story hundreds of thousands of other people can tell. Although the threads and themes of the story will differ for each person, the story will always be a story of transformation.

In our case, the story began when our oldest son told us that he was gay. We were shocked, and it was tough to get used to. When we were growing up nobody talked about gay and lesbian couples. It was a different era then.

But we had to find some way to understand because he was still our son, the same one we'd loved all his life. We knew that we had to listen to our son, and to open our ears and our hearts. This became doubly important when our youngest son told us that he also was gay.

Since that time we've been reassured and overjoyed by the loving, committed relationships our sons found with their partners. We visit with them at their homes where we see them as old married folks who share their lives and their joys and sorrows. They are each other's soul mates. It is just wonderful to watch.

We're pleased that all four of our children have found life partners, and that they are committed to the responsibilities of marriage. As a minister, I was able to stand before our daughters at their weddings and perform their ceremonies. I would like to do the same for both our sons.



Brian Houle with partner Peter Rossing and Beth and Gib Rossing.

We once viewed homosexuality as a sin from which to repent. Now we are overjoyed by the quality of our gay sons' relationships and proud of their commitment. Clearly, this is a transformation for us.

Our transformation process involved study, research, emotional and mental wrestling with scientific and religious issues, and discussions

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with counselors, other pastors, and family.

In the end, however, it was the stories we heard from our sons, and many people like them, that confirmed the truth we found in the knowledge we had acquired. From them we learned that the "problem" of homosexuality was ours, not theirs. We were the ones who needed to change.

Some would say, "You compromised your faith by putting sentiment for your sons above truth," or, "You rationalized your acceptance of your sons' homosexuality to assuage the guilt of tolerating evil."

These are judgments made by people who haven't listened to our whole story. They denigrate the transformation because they discount the searching, struggling, discovering, worrying, growing, and changing that happened between our "before" and "after."

But those who hear our story, who listen carefully enough to respect the integrity of our convictions, and to appreciate the quality of our relationships, often find themselves transformed, or at least launched into their own journey of transformation. We have seen it happen many times.



Beth and Gib Rossing with their son Jonathan and his partner Ryan Merkle.

People don't change their minds because of clever arguments. Witty factoids don't whittle down resistance to clear logic. To the contrary, people fearfully shut down mentally in the face of discomfiting views that conflict with long held judgments.

But people do change their minds when they listen to people tell personal stories in such a way that they feel comfortable considering views to which they might never before have given serious attention.

Transformation stories do transform others. And that is why it is so very important for gays and their straight allies to keep telling their stories of transformation.

The movement for equal rights is where it is today because gays came out of the closet of fear. Parents and family of gays came out of the closet of shame. Friends of gays came out of the closet of embarrassment.

They told their personal stories of going from being closeted to being out—loud and proud, from cowering under denigrating social stereotypes to living confidently in the certainty of their true character and worth.

Enough people listened to their stories over the years that transformations perpetuated themselves until the social landscape itself changed. Evidence of this change is seen in polls showing that a thin majority now approves same-sex marriage.

Furthermore, many faith communities, previously known only by their opposition to glbtq rights, are taking a more visible stand in support of their rights. That is, in itself, a remarkable social transformation.

For the first time in history, faith communities and faith directors are an integral part of marriage equality campaigns like those in Washington, Minnesota, Maryland, and Maine. When a person speaks in support of marriage equality as a person of faith to an undecided voter, the chances increase by 70% that the voter will vote favorably for marriage equality.

We will be happy to tell our story whenever we discover people who are ready to listen. I expect we all are eager to tell our transformational stories. As long as the transformation of society regarding glbtq issues is incomplete, we will tell our stories.

As we tell our stories with integrity of conviction, and with relationships of exemplary quality, I believe the time will come when society will look back, as we now look back on the age of racial segregation, and wonder why it took so long to change.

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About Gilbert Rossing

Gib Rossing is a retired pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. He is a graduate of Luther College and Luther Theological Seminary. He also holds a Master's degree in Education from Portland State University. He is author of *Dignity, Dogmatism, and Same-Sex Relationships: What Science and Scripture Teach Us* (2009).



Gib and Beth Rossing.

Rossing served parishes in Washington, Oregon, and Texas. He now resides in Olympia, Washington with his wife, Beth. He and Beth are co-founders of Faith Based Movement for Marriage Equality, a [website](#) that encourages people of faith to visibly support marriage equality.

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