



# Our Stories: Tomboy

when i was 11, life was pretty good. my outfits consisted of a few items: two pairs of jean shorts, a texas rangers t-shirt, and an unremarkable shirt i wore when that one was in the laundry. i dressed purely for comfort, as any child should do at 11, and if i had facebook at the time, my statuses would have read: "i love GAK!", "breaking in COOL new super soaker xs330!!!", and "parents got me bb gun for xmas!!!"

my parents and many others referred to me as a "tomboy" - a term which i always hated. i didn't want to be a boy. did i? i didn't think so. and although i didn't have access to wikipedia to study the deeper meanings of "tomboy", i saw it as demeaning. i knew it meant that i was trying to act like a boy in some way - when i wanted to just be me. i didn't want a one word explanation for why i liked to climb trees or strategize for all-day water gun wars.

i felt they were saying "it's okay everyone, she's just doing it because she likes doing things that boys do." a pre-emptive excuse so that no one would suspect that there was something deeper going on. no, i liked doing things that *i* liked doing. me, a girl.

my hair was short - not really short, but the easiest way i can explain it is to call it a grown-out bowl cut. i didn't have anything against long hair - in principle. but it was texas - it's 100 degrees there in september, in the shade. the kind of heat that would make rapunzel get a buzz cut.

plus, my hair is super thick. i know, people say this all the time. but mine *is*. i'm special. this made my mom's hairbrushing sessions bring tears to my eyes - which is no small feat, considering how tough i am. so, when i was old enough to reason with her - i begged my mom to cut my hair so that i could escape the tangles, the tears, and the extra 20 degrees that was weighing on my shoulders.

my hairstyle didn't do much for people's perception of me as a girl in boy's clothing. i remember being at my dad's work and one of his co-workers came up to me and calmly assured me that one day, i would grow out of this phase, want to grow my hair out, and actually *enjoy* wearing dresses.

like my life - full of imagination and play - was something i was looking to grow out of. and that wearing dresses would be a sign of something, a reward for putting down my bb gun and picking up a tube of lipstick. i wanted to take my slingshot and nail her right between the eyes.

deserved slingshot malice aside, some of my interests were non-violent. i spent hours writing poems and stories, listening to oldies music, drawing pictures of wild-haired people escaping from castles, and monopoly marathons with my sister. i read books that made me want to live with bears on venus and travel to middle earth to see if i was brave enough to help save the world. i watched countless reruns of 'i love lucy' and aspired for her comedic timing and acquisition of a bosom buddy just like ethel.

and there was romance, too. kind of.

for years my siblings and i attended 'christian skate night' at the local roller rink: texas skatium. i'm not sure what was especially christian about it besides the fact that they played only christian music and didn't have as many couple skates. perhaps the soda was spiked with holy water (that would've explained its lack of carbonation) and the music played subliminal anti-masturbation messages.

skate night was a good time for all - as we got to skate in a circle for at least 2 hours, sometimes getting to do a reverse skate, a limbo, the hokey pokey, and my favourite - the speed skate. these were all soundtracked with jaunty pop-conservative songs, allowing us to have fun, but to be

always mindful that we were sinners.

these synth-keyboard filled tunes were interrupted only for the aforementioned 'couple skate', where slow-conservative songs were played so that sweaty palmed christians could hold each other's hands while they skated in a circle. these were always the low point of the night - because it meant that i had to stop skating, and watch doey-eyed morons skate in awkwardly synced slow-motion. gross.

one such night, still in my 11th year, the dj announced that the couple skate was coming up next and i skated towards my cubby, mentally armouring myself for 4 minutes of hell. a group of girls my age glided up to me - the lights were already being dimmed for romantic effect - and i noticed they seemed nervous and giggly.

they stared at me for a moment, smiling shyly, like i was going to guess why they were there.

"uh, hi," i said, throwing them a bone.

they giggled in unison, as if they were programmed, and finally, one stepped in closer and blurred:

"our friend wants to couple skate with you!"

they seemed collectively relieved that the news was out, and tense in anticipation for the answer.

in a split-second i knew what was happening. in my experience, when you are 11 years old, you customarily do not have a group of friends that are a different gender than you. these high-strung girls were gathered in solidarity, requesting that my sweaty palm be joined together, for the next 3.2 minutes, with the sweaty palm of their friend, who i knew was going to be a girl. i also knew that this was not a joke and that this was not a progressive plea to move forward against social norms. no way, not here. not on christian skate night.

i knew all of this, yet i still asked:

"who is it?"

they parted, like the red sea, and pointed behind them towards a timid brunette who looked like she was waiting to hear if she was going to live to see her 12th birthday. she was cute.

i didn't know what to say, so my brain chose for me.

"i'm a girl."

a unison gasp, then various oohs and aahs, followed by a few mumbled apologies. they skated off to their lady-in-waiting, to tell her the embarrassing news. i looked away.

i sat alone, digesting what had happened. i remember exactly how i felt, but it's something that i would never have been able to articulate then.

i was partly crestfallen. they thought i was a boy. i didn't want to be a boy. i knew that some people thought i looked like one, acted like one. okay. but i wasn't. i wanted to be me, and it be okay that i was me without being compared to something else.

i was partly elated. a *girl* had just asked me to skate with her. well, her four friends had just asked on her behalf, but same difference. a *girl* looked at me

**"I'm glad I was honest..."**

Continued on next page...



## Let Your Voice Be Heard . . . . Join a National Consultation!

During the late summer and fall, you will have the opportunity to attend a regional gathering to tell your stories, and **voice your thoughts and observations about the attitudes toward homophobia and heterosexism in The United Church of Canada in 2011 and to express your hopes for the future.**

Persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities are invited to attend a gathering facilitated by trained, skilled leaders, with the view to collecting useable data on where we are and where we need to be in the future as we strive to become an intercultural church, welcoming all people in our church communities. **This consultation was mandated by the 40<sup>th</sup> General Council** in 2009 to consult "with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and two-spirited members of the United Church to discuss homophobia and heterosexism in the church". The consultation is called to report to General Council 41 in 2012.

**The consultation will take the form of a series of regional gatherings** in order to hear from as many people as possible across the country. It is being planned by a team of 5 people with the support of two General Council staff and a professional consultant with extensive experience working with the LGBTTT community from an intercultural perspective, Beth Zemsky. As we proceed with our plans, we are excited about the opportunity to hear from many folks, both in the LGBTTT community and the heterosexual community – the whole people of God – with the hope that, as we listen and share, we will be strengthened in our resolve to offer radical hospitality to all.

**The first regional gathering will be on Sunday afternoon, August 7<sup>th</sup> at Southminster-Steinhauer United Church, 10740-19 Ave., Edmonton AB T6J 6W9.** This will follow the Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble Annual National Conference to be held

Thursday August 4<sup>th</sup> to Sunday August 7<sup>th</sup> 2011 at the same location. We hope you will be at both the national conference and the consultation gathering but if you are unable to come for the whole weekend, please try to join us for the Sunday afternoon gathering.

Our plan is to offer **other regional gatherings** in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, west/central Ontario, eastern Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island/New Brunswick/Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland Labrador throughout the fall of 2011.

As **dates of the other gatherings** are set, we will advertise them through all the Conference Offices, the Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble email list and website, the United Church of Canada website and through friends. If you have suggestions for promotion in your area, please contact Alcris Limongi in the General Council office at [alimongi@united-church.ca](mailto:alimongi@united-church.ca)

God's radical hospitality is for all! How are we doing in The United Church of Canada? Where do we go from here and how? **Come . . . let your voice be heard and help to shape an open, welcoming and affirming future for The United Church of Canada.**

Planning Team Members are:

Sally Harris (Vancouver BC) [docks@shaw.ca](mailto:docks@shaw.ca)  
Linda Hutchinson (Kingston ON) [hutchinl@kingston.net](mailto:hutchinl@kingston.net)  
Moses Kanhai (Regina SK) [kanhaim@accesscomm.ca](mailto:kanhaim@accesscomm.ca)  
Alcris Limongi (GC Office Toronto) [alimongi@united-church.ca](mailto:alimongi@united-church.ca)

Brian Mitchell-Walker (Regina SK) [brimitch@sasktel.net](mailto:brimitch@sasktel.net)  
Judy Sullivan (GC Office Toronto) [jsulliva@united-church.ca](mailto:jsulliva@united-church.ca)

---

Tomboy continued...

and liked me enough to want to skate around in a circle, touching my hand, maybe even talking to me a little bit.

for years i looked back at that moment and replayed the scene in my mind. sometimes i wished that i hadn't told them that i was a girl - so that i would've had that 3.2 minutes of heaven. or that maybe i would've told them that i wasn't allowed to couple skate - that it was against my religion - so that they could still think that i was a boy, but that now i would be even more desirable by virtue of my unattainability. perhaps one night i would meet one of them in the dimly lit, under-supervised arcade, and we would share a kiss next to the pac-man machine.

but it could not be. my sister's were there with me every week and my developing body would only ally with my charade for so long. besides, i didn't really want any girl to like me because she thought i was a boy. i wanted her to like me because i was...me.

so i guess i'm glad i was honest. i wonder about that girl - the shy brunette - and

if she felt a spark, after the initial social embarrassment wore off, when she found out that i was a girl. maybe she somehow knew all along. either way, i still hold on to that memory and remember what i felt like when i first knew that a girl liked me.

and to my parents credit, they did let me wear and do what i wanted to most of the time. although one time i caught my mom trying to iron my rangers t-shirt and i thought i was going to die. the wrinkles were *part of the outfit*. i guess i did care about fashion...

--

Pam Rocker  
Media and Communications Coordinator  
Hillhurst United Church  
[www.hillhurstunited.com](http://www.hillhurstunited.com)