

Our Mission Continues

By Amity Pierce Buxton, Founder

Our three-fold mission of **Reaching Out**, **Healing**, and **Building Bridges** remains stronger than ever. Reaching out worldwide through communication and education increases visibility of post-disclosure spouses, couples, and families. The Straight Spouse Network provides resources to help deal constructively with the unique issues created by a spouse's coming out.

The Network's core work is support for the **Healing** of spouses, couples, and families. Our volunteer peer-Support Group Facilitators, Support Contacts, and online groups, are coordinated by our central staff. They handle calls for help, maintain our website, publications and provide social media presence.

The third part of our mission is providing information for **Building Bridges** of understanding between post-disclosure spouses, within families and society. That includes communication with professionals, so they can grasp the real factors underlying a spouse's coming out and its impact on the straight spouse and children.



BE A CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Submit original articles, relevant news issues, upcoming events, personal stories, photos, poetry and art pertaining to the Straight Spouse Experience. Send submissions for consideration, in the form of pdfs or word documents to Daphne Callen, SSNDaphneChicago@gmail.com.

WELCOME to News&Notes, the official newsletter for the Straight Spouse Network. We're here to present relevant information and insights for Straight Spouses, their families, Support Group Facilitators, Support Contacts, Group Participants and Straight Spouse Network supporters. We strive to inspire understanding and recognition of the Straight Spouse Experience and the important work our organization does to help those affected by it worldwide.

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EVERY MONTH SETS A RECORD

As the Straight Spouse Network's exposure through social media grows, steadily increasing numbers of Straight Spouses are finding out about us, and logging onto our website to request support.

According to our Triage Director, April ended with 160 requests. As of mid-May, we were at 70. She predicts May will be a record breaking month as there are no signs of things slowing down soon.

Whether someone fills out our email form or calls our hot line, each and everyone is contacted personally and directed to the Straight Spouse volunteer closest to them for support.

If you are a Straight Spouse who feels you are ready to start supporting others just starting out on the Straight Spouse Journey, we need your help. You must, however meet certain criteria:

- There is a need in your vicinity
- You have been in a support group for at least two years, or have been in close communication with one of our Support Contacts for a significant period of time
- Your relationship/marital issues with your LGBT partner are reasonably resolved
- You've moved forward with your life and are willing and able to give intuitive peer support to Straight Spouses just starting out on their journey.

If you meet the criteria:

- You must go through an application and interview process with our Executive Director
- Upon acceptance, you will receive the Facilitator Handbook and some helpful forms. The Handbook is your training guide. It contains the Straight Spouse Network Policies, to which you should adhere as well as other research based information.

Sometimes a Facilitator will decide that they want to stop leading a group. The first thing they should do is contact our Executive Director to be processed out. Ideally, they may recommend someone who has been in their group whom they feel would be a good fit, to take the reins.

In that case, the candidate must go through the application process with our Executive Director. And the out-going Facilitator must send their email list of past and current support group members to the Executive Director as well.

Currently we're looking for group facilitators and/or support contacts in these locations: Burlingame, CA area, Mississippi, Wyoming, South Dakota, North Dakota, West Virginia, and Oahu, Hawaii.

Helping those who are taking their first steps on this journey is a truly rewarding experience. Discuss the possibilities with your Support Group Facilitator or Support Contact, and contact our Executive Director Daphne Callen at SSNdaphnechicago@gmail.com.

For over 25 years, Straight Spouses have proven that our connections with one another are vital for our own healing.

STATE OF THE NETWORK

THE STAFF WORKING LIKE A FINELY TUNED ORCHESTRA

Daphne Callen, Executive Director

Daphne orchestrates staff projects, working together with the communications director and web/data/creative director on a daily basis. She is responsible for financial concerns, interfacing with the Board of Directors, and for recruiting and vetting new Support Group Facilitators and Support Contacts. She also oversees Triage and co-mans the Straight Spouse Network Hotline. Since 2007 she has been a primary referral contact in Chicago where she has been an active group facilitator since 2008. Daphne is also an online group moderator, has co-hosted Chicago Gatherings, and is an experienced Straight Spouse Network speaker.

Janet McMonagle, Communications Director

Janet, who became our Communications Director in February 2016, is a Social Media expert. She increases our visibility worldwide through Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, edits our blog "Straight Talk", featuring varied Straight Spouse experiences; handles public relations and media inquiries for interviews with Straight Spouse Network representatives, runs our Speakers Bureau, fielding requests for appearances by Straight Spouse Network Speakers. She also responds to articles or broadcasts that feature Straight Spouse issues. And Janet is seeking grant money to add Podcasts in the near future.

Linda Ehle-Callens, Facilitator Liaison, Web/Data Manager, Creative Director

Linda is an art director, graphic designer, illustrator, author/writer/editor. In 2008 she started designing News&Notes, donation campaigns, and other special communications. She did our rebranding and co-designed our new website with longtime business associate, Sam Grinels and was brought on staff in 2013. She created new editions of our Facilitator and Speakers Handbooks, and worked with Janet in reviving the Speakers Bureau. She restructured our data base, created and maintains our Triage Guide, our collateral, conducts surveys, maintains and updates our website, creates bulletins and handles specialized communications with facilitators and Straight Spouses. She has been a group facilitator in Pasadena, CA for almost six years.

Jean L, Triage Director

Jean has been orchestrating triage since 2010. Since then the number of facilitators and calls have increased

threefold. She vets each call, processes often delicate information, and creates an appropriate first response before turning to our network of facilitators to find a match with the right person in the right location. She has a relationship with nearly every volunteer and stays informed on many levels. Keeping up with as many as 30 calls a day is an incredible feat, and Jean, who does this as a volunteer, gives sincere attention to every single person when they first reach out to the Straight Spouse Network..

Amity Pierce Buxton, PhD, Founder, Staff Advisor

Before founding the network, Amity developed curriculum materials and learning/teaching methods for multi-ethnic K-12 schools and helped pioneer the teachers' center movement. A major researcher, writer, and speaker, she is still our main motivation. As a volunteer, Amity confers with the staff regularly to discuss every facet of the work we are all doing. Her insights, understanding, and vast knowledge are invaluable assets. And her hard work ethic and boundless energy are truly inspiring to all of us who are humbly following in her footsteps.

Jeff C., Triage Hotline, Tech Support

Jeff is an important part of our Triage process. He volunteers his time to answer, process and redirect our Hotline calls. He is also a technical consultant. Jeff co-facilitates the Chicago group and helps coordinate their popular gatherings.

Sam Grinels, Technical Director

Now an independent consultant, Sam Grinels has over 40 years experience in marketing communications. He helped with the structure and implementation of Straight Spouse Network's new website. For the past several years he has assisted the Staff and Board with the organization's ongoing marketing endeavors and technical operations.

Peggy Montgomery, Volunteer Editorial Support

In 1995, Peggy read a *NYTimes* article about Amity and her work with straight spouses, called her, and was invited to meet for tea at the Metropolitan Museum the next time Amity was in town. She did, and so began the SSN/Manhattan group, which celebrates its 21st anniversary in June. Peggy is a retired English teacher and an expert editor who makes sure our final words are correct and content is perfectly polished.

*Straight Spouse Groups are **ALL INCLUSIVE***

Sometimes a Straight Spouse will find our website when they're looking for support, but won't read the information thoroughly. They scan quickly, like too many people do. Then they decide that we're 'not for them'.

They see the words "transgender", or "mixed-orientation marriage" and get confused. I've had to explain to several people who were sceptical about whether or not we could understand their situation and can help them. "Well, we *are* the *Straight Spouse Network*." We're all Straight Spouses giving peer support to other Straight Spouses. That's the bottom line.

Today we're seeing an increase in spin-off groups who may include only people in one type of situation or another. However, in any Straight Spouse Network Support Group, you will find Straight Spouses who are in different stages of their journeys; you'll find some of them have gay or lesbian spouses, some have bisexual spouses, some have transgender spouses. Some are divorcing, some staying together, some are taking their time to decide what they want. It doesn't matter; we're all Straight Spouses. The Straight Spouse Network is All-Inclusive.

Straight Spouses need to get into the group and start sharing. One thing that happens a lot with newcomers in the group is that they talk about discovery... a lot. This is something that is significant for a short period of time. In the larger scheme of things, it doesn't really matter

how you find out. It's best not to dwell on that, or on the perhaps lurid details. You're walking out of that closet. But, then what?

We have all been affected by having lived with a closeted person. We have to deal with the after-affects of what we experienced during our relationships. We have go further, and understand how those after-affects will work against us if we don't identify and confront them. Here are some of them:

Super sensitivity to criticism or rudeness. Poor self esteem. Poor body image/weight gain, Damaged ego. Fear of dating and intimacy, Difficulty trusting others. Suddenly seeing gay people everywhere you look.

What we say is true, you're not alone. These after-affects are common; they're 'textbook'.

Who better to discuss those specific things with than people who have been through them, or are going through them, like you are? An experienced Group Facilitator can help guide a group forward because they've taken the path and completed the journey. Now they are guides in the All-Inclusive club no one ever wanted to join, but it certainly is a great place to find support and understanding while you take your own journey, start to finish.

-Linda Ehle-Callens, Editorial Team



FOUNDER AMITY PIERCE BUXTON HAPPY 25TH BIRTHDAY STRAIGHT SPOUSE NETWORK!

In 1991, Jane Vennard, featured in Amity Buxton's *The Other Side of the Closet*, turned over

PFLAG's fledgling Task Force for Straight Spouses to Amity. Amity reorganized the few support groups and regional contacts into a "network" of interconnection. She expanded its reach to straight husbands, spouses of trans mates, and post-disclosure couples.

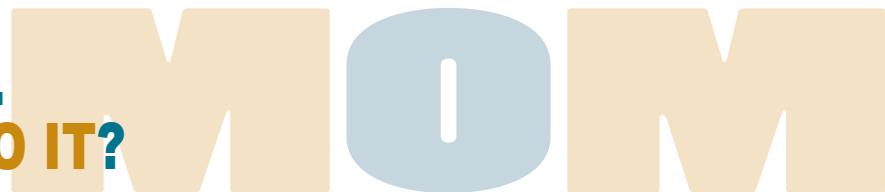
The number and range of contacts grew. A Straight Spouse newsletter gave Amity publishing rights and access to their subscribers. PFLAG staff helped the network operate, and the Gay Fathers Coalition International (now Family Equality Council) established a network web site. As a result of her media presence and her book's success, Amity and Straight Spouses appeared on Oprah, Phil Donahue, Montel Williams, and other shows. Dear Abby found the

network. News articles appeared, from the New York Times and International Herald Tribune to several local publications.

Group facilitators began organizing local gatherings and confidential online groups. Meanwhile, Amity wrote journal articles on post disclosure spouses, couples, and children and presented them at national and international conferences for the American Psychological Association, Bisexual Network, Family Equality Coalition, Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and American Association of Conciliation Courts. By 2000, Straight Spouses carried their own banner in the March for Equality in Washington, DC. We were ready to be incorporated as a nonprofit organization, with a Board of Directors and an administrative Staff. Through the tireless work of our Founder, Amity Buxton, we are the worldwide Straight Spouse Network.

STAYING TOGETHER. HOW DO COUPLES DO IT? WE'RE REACHING OUT FOR ANSWERS

A lot of Straights consider the idea of staying together, when they first discover that their spouse/partner is not straight. But how do they do it? With your help, we will be reaching out to mixed orientation married couples who have decided to stay together. We want to gather as much information as possible to help new Straight Spouses make more informed decisions when considering staying in the marriage or divorcing. With your input, we hope to provide couples with a realistic look at how feasible staying together actually is for them. We want to know the reasons why staying together was the best choice for some couples. With detailed insights, we can examine the realities, challenges and the chances of long-term success for others.



Select information collected in the survey will be used to create an article for our next newsletter and will serve as an important educational tool for Group Facilitators/Support Contacts. Participants can use alias names, unless they want to use their own. There will be specific questions, but we do not need to know how it was discovered that spouses were LGBT.

Support Group Facilitators and Support Contacts will be receiving detailed information on this project. If you are a Straight Spouse who has stayed with your LGBT spouse/partner and would like to participate, please contact your Support Group Facilitator or email LindaE@straightspouse.org.

Sacred Lies, Sober Truths

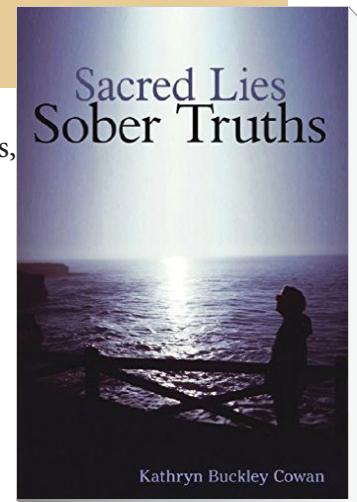
Exciting New Novel by Kathryn Buckley Cowan

WHO SAYS A STRAIGHT SPOUSE STORY CAN'T BE ENTERTAINING?

One of the best ways for Straight Spouses to tell their stories is by writing books about the experience; but even better, a novel. And this one is getting rave reviews. We'd like to congratulate Kathryn Buckley Cowan on the publication of her riveting novel, *Sacred Lies, Sober Truths*.

The story takes place in the vibrant early 70's. The main character, Meredith, wants to escape a troubled relationship and eagerly jumps into a marriage with a handsome man who has a few secrets. He attempts to recreate her, having her wear certain clothing, dye her hair platinum blonde, and be the impossibly perfect wife. As the signs of his homosexuality become clear, the couple decides to seek counselling.

Being devout Catholics, they choose to see a priest for help. But, the priest has a few secrets of his own, and takes the husband's side. In an era when there is little acknowledgement or support for Straight Spouses, Meredith must make her own difficult decision, whether to lead her own life or remain trapped in anger and bitterness.



Kathryn Buckley Cowan

*Kathryn Buckley Cowan is a widowed Straight Spouse who lives in Santa Cruz, California. Writing *Sacred Lies, Sober Truths* was a sincere labor of love meant to help other Straight Spouses. It's available on Amazon in paperback or Kindle editions at www.straightspouse.org. Resources*

Joyce Miller featured in sanjoseinside magazine

The Straight Spouse Network's Joyce Miller, the Support Group Facilitator in San Jose, California was recently interviewed by Jennifer Wadsworth for an article in *sanjoseinside*, an online magazine. Joyce and a number of her support group members shared their experiences. The article features a candid discussion about their discovery that their husbands were gay, and how they proceeded through recovering and rebuilding their lives.

Joyce originally came to the Straight Spouse Network, not as a Straight Spouse, but as a PFLAG volunteer. She had a gay son and she wanted to help other families of LGBT persons. Joyce reflects, "While some people were celebrating the fact that they had gay kids, I began hearing about these Straight Spouses who weren't seeing a reason to celebrate." Joyce has been facilitating her support group for 19 years now.

We are fortunate to have volunteers of Joyce's caliber; her dedication is helping so many Straight Spouses heal and providing the support and empathy each one needs in order to move forward with their lives. And now she has helped us get our message out to the public with her interview.



An interesting note: at the end of the article there are comments, some of which demonstrate the disrespect some people have for Straight Spouses and the depth of our experiences. Please leave your comments after you read the whole article here: <http://www.sanjoseinside.com/2016/04/06/support-group-helps-straight-exes-of-gay-partners/>

Straight Out Loud

– by Jennifer Ferrante

I am a straight female. But in the past two years, my life has been directly touched by homosexuality. I am a Straight Spouse. Since the day we met, my husband had been cheating on me with female escorts. I always thought that if anyone cheated on me I would leave them immediately, but life is never as black and white as we think it will be.

We went to therapy for two years. He told me the cheating was because he felt self-conscious and insecure about certain aspects of his personal life.

He seemed so heartbroken and was clearly hurting so deeply that I believed him and chose to stick by him to get help and work on things together. Things got better

and he wanted to start a family. We got pregnant and I gave birth to twins. While I was on maternity leave my contract ended. We were in a situation where the primary provider was unemployed. Then I discovered my husband was cheating again, but he finally confessed that he was interested in sexual relationships with transgenders and possibly men. I learned that he'd used a credit card to hire female escorts in a desperate attempt to convince himself that he was straight.

He'd borrowed money from his parents to pay off the card, and asked them not to tell me. I was a first time mom of 6 month old twins, I'd just lost my job and was facing total betrayal by my best friend and life partner. I dragged him kicking and screaming from the closet. We lost our house, our cars, and had to declare bankruptcy. I am well educated with much professional experience. I live in low income housing now.

This is the real damage that homophobia and transphobia cause. My now ex-husband would be the

first to say that I tried everything I could to support him and help him find the path to self-acceptance. Even though I was devastated and my heart was breaking, it was breaking even more for him. I can't imagine him hating himself so much that he felt forced to live such an elaborate lie that even he started to believe it. Although I still struggle with some of his choices and the betrayal, I try to imagine how he must have felt growing up with family and friends he thought were too homophobic to confide in.

As they say, Straight Spouses are the victims of the victims of homophobia. My ex-husband is truly confused and full of self-loathing because of his attraction to men. I want him to be healthy, happy and to accept himself so that he can continue to be a good father and role model to our children.

My children and I are living examples of the collateral damage that transphobic and homophobic attitudes in society have caused. Straight Spouses are often invisible when their loved ones come out. They are ashamed, embarrassed, and even afraid of sounding homophobic. In reality, most of us are allies and want equality.

There are support groups for those struggling with gender and sexuality issues. But sadly, there is little attention given to the Straight Spouses and children who are left behind when a loved one comes out. Often this results in the Straight Spouse retreating into the same closet that their partner just vacated. This is why the Straight Spouse Network is so important.

There is a way to support both sides without playing a blame game. If there is any blame to be had, it is not on the individuals, but on the archaic prevailing social attitude of hate and discrimination. With proper dialogue, inclusion and support, I believe Straight Spouses and their partners can be allies and should both be able to hold their heads high and work toward a world where one day there will be no more Straight Spouses.

– Jennifer Ferrante is a Straight Spouse Network Support Group Facilitator in Ottawa, Canada

BYSTANDER EFFECT TURNING A BLIND EYE

by Linda Ehle-Callens



We've all heard the story about the woman who was screaming for help in front of her apartment building one night. The neighbors all watched from their windows while she was sexually assaulted and then murdered. All it would have taken was one person to move past their paralysis of insulation to save her life.

The Bystander Effect refers to the situation of a group of people who observe someone in trouble but fail to go to the person's aid. They are collectively thinking, "someone else will do it." Part of the psychological explanation might also be, "if someone else isn't stepping

in to help, then I probably shouldn't help either." This is a common occurrence, a curious human trait; and most definitely it is not an admirable one.

"If someone else isn't stepping in to help, then I probably shouldn't help either."

This 'effect' spills over into all aspects of life. So, how does Bystander Effect apply to the work we Straight Spouse Network volunteers do?

Most Straight Spouses who seek us out do so in hope of going to meetings, finding others they can relate to, getting the chance to vent, learn, feel accepted and understood. They find their Facilitator, communicate and plan to go to the next meeting. And then at the last minute, they get cold feet. They find excuses to stay away, "they won't miss me, they don't need me." Even people who have been in the group for a while think that way sometimes. That is a bit like being a Bystander, saying, "other people will go..."

If we all gave into this apathetic trait, how would organized groups trying to make change ever get off the ground? The human race can only do great things when we have strength in numbers. If everyone is waiting for someone else to take the first step, everything could remain at a standstill forever.

Here's another applicable Bystander attitude: when we feel we have to protect someone who won't admit they're gay. Consider what the consequences of silence could be. You have a friend who is married to a nice woman. They have three kids. But you know that her husband is gay and is on the down low, cheating on his wife with men. But, you feel it's none of your business. You're just a bystander. Eventually you learn that the wife has contracted an STD, or maybe even AIDS. It's happened for real and it could have been prevented.

What if the husband wasn't gay and cheating with prostitutes? Would you tell the wife then? If you're a woman, and you know your best friend's husband is cheating on her with men, would you tell her? I would.

My grandmother used to say to me, "he who hesitates is lost." We all hold back sometimes. When that happens, we need to recognize it and force ourselves to move. Step forward. Go. Do. If you see something, you should say something. Don't turn a blind eye.

Linda Ehle-Callens is a professional writer/editor/art director, nine years post-disclosure. She is on the Straight Spouse Network Staff and has been a volunteer Group Facilitator for over five years in Pasadena, California.