

Former Uniting Church minister Ron Brookman, 59, married his second wife Ruth, 41, in 1994. Two years later, he told her about his past life as a gay man. The couple have three children and run an outreach program to help Christians struggling with sexuality.

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Ron & Ruth
Brookman



Ron: I was 11 when I was seduced by an older boy; it really set the wet cement of my sexuality. I became involved in the Presbyterian Church when I was 17 and my homosexuality was driven inward, but it was always just under the surface. When I was 26 I discovered homosexual pornography. It took hold of my life. I got married when I was 29 for all the wrong reasons. I wanted to keep up appearances as a happily married minister but it was a very sad and dysfunctional marriage.

After my first wife left with our two children [then aged 2 and 4], I allowed myself to be seduced again. Every four or five months I would go to the bathhouses or the beats at Darlinghurst [in inner-city Sydney]. Every time I would vow it would be the last. But my whole desire was to find the man with whom I would spend my life. It was my secret search, my constant fantasy. My deepest pain was because I stood on the premise that homosexuality is not consistent with the Bible.

The turning point came in 1990 when I heard the Christian psychiatrist John White speak. He was talking about sexual sins and it was like he was speaking just to me. That began a three-year journey of meeting fortnightly with another pastor and confessing my sins. He prayed for the pain in my heart and asked that the Holy Spirit bring healing. Slowly but surely I was transformed. My healing has not been that everything has been removed, but the neediness is gone.

I was a pastor at Newtown Mission when Ruth moved into its hostel in 1988. I was sitting on the doorstep talking

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I recognised her integrity, her wisdom and her grace.

Little did I think that a few years later the chemistry would click. It happened over coffee one day. Looking into her eyes, something happened that had never happened before. I was confused, but I was also excited because there was something dawning in me. I walked home bouncing. I loved her beauty. The way her hair hung, the way she had an elegance and a dignity in her whole manner.

I did not think I would ever marry again, mostly because of the homosexuality. I'd always wanted to have a large family but I didn't know how to do that as a homosexual man. When we married [in 1994] there was an excitement about the probability of more children. I didn't fear it was going to be a sham because there was a greater depth in our relationship. The issues that undermined my first marriage had been dealt with.

To my shame I didn't tell Ruth [about my past] until about two years into our marriage. I feared rejection. When I told her, she handled it really well. She looked me in the face and smiled. She knew and she accepted me.

to a friend when Ruth walked past. He said: "Not a bad-looking chick, is she." I said: "Whoever marries Ruth will be the luckiest guy on earth." There was no romantic attraction. At that stage every fibre of my being was homosexual. But

My worst fears were not realised. But I put her through a lot of pain. I regret that and it's the mark of the woman Ruth is that our love was deepened through it.

I am now a lay pastor in the Uniting Church and my main desire is to help people who are in pain find healing and wholeness. Broken sexuality need not define who we are. All of us have fallen short of God's purpose and his grace restores us. My homosexual desire has completely gone. Where I do have to be careful is to avoid the adrenaline rush of finding something on the internet that is not pornography but verging on it. I'm completely accountable to Ruth and to the groups that I run.

The beauty of our relationship feeds me and my relationship with God. Ruth is a woman of great wisdom, integrity and trust. She knows my heart. The openness and honesty of our relationship is the strength of our love. I'm not looking to Ruth for my identity, I just like being with her. She complements me well and is a wonderful mother. She is somebody I can utterly trust. We go to sleep holding one another. I feel absolutely secure in our relationship.

Ruth: I always knew Ron was withholding something from me. In the early years, I felt like our marriage was from the neck up. There was a shallowness in both of us, but I longed for more connection with him. When he told me, I felt an incredible sense of peace. I don't know what exactly I expected to hear. I hadn't tried to guess but I had an intuition and so at some level it wasn't a surprise.

If he hadn't come out to the church [in 1997 at the Uniting Church's National Assembly in Perth] we may never have talked about it again. I didn't want him to revisit the shame and pain. And I probably didn't want to break my own naivety. When he told me, it was in very broad brushstrokes. In my mind it was a homosexual orientation, rather than visiting beats in Darlinghurst. When he shared to the church, it was a different level of detail [so] the shock was much greater.

Such an intimate part of our life became public very quickly. It meant being honest with my parents, and Ron's father, and that took an enormous amount of courage. I bore some of Ron's shame and rejection. Understandably, some people in the church felt betrayed and deceived. That triggered a crisis in our lives. We were stood down from the ministry and Ron was asked to take leave. Eventually he was reinstated but the damage was done.

The right thing would have been for Ron to tell me before we were married. There was a dishonouring of me and a breach of trust. There was a lot of trauma that could have been avoided. But it's not something I regret. I love Ron and I believe in the covenant of marriage. We had to lay a new foundation for our marriage but I never felt I would leave. I respect that he chose to face the consequences of his actions. Our journey has also given me the insight to be able to help other women. I run a wives' support group and all kinds of women come with all kinds of stories. I love being able to work with Ron and for our relationship to have meaning beyond ourselves.

Ron and I have done the hard work and we've gone to the depths. I don't fear Ron is going to wake up one morning and say, "I'm gay." I trust in the authenticity of his healing journey and I trust him. I have zero fear that he's going to be unfaithful because of that and the transparency in our relationship.

When we first got together, I idolised him. I was 22 and he appeared to be a wonderful godly man who helped the poor and ran soup kitchens. I put him on a pedestal. He was God-like in my eyes. When he was knocked off his perch very publicly and very dramatically, it was a shock. I learnt Ron wasn't God and that he was fallible. Part of my growing up was recognising my own immaturity and finding my voice in our relationship.

Every couple has their issues to deal with. Our particular issue happens to be sexuality. What I am enjoying now is a depth of relationship that is no longer from the neck up but from the heart. **GW**