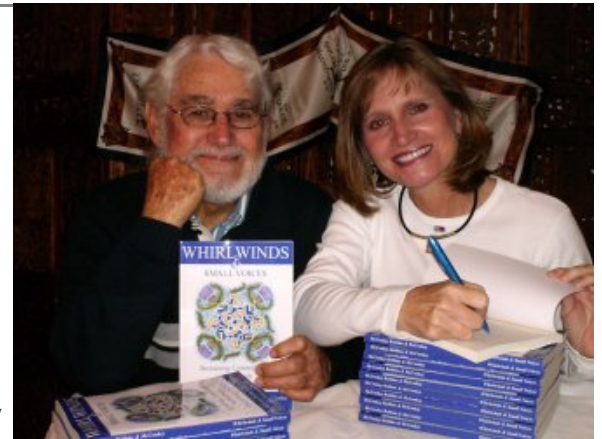




UMC Pastor-Daughter team write about profession, faith

Who would have thought someone's "ah-ha" moment would come in a vintage wooden cigar box, made in Honduras and stamped, "50 Cazadores" (hunters or seekers, as the word translates)?

As a speech-language pathologist, working primarily with deaf children wearing cochlear implants, Amy McConkey Robbins' ah-ha moment came about five years ago in the form of the small, tattered journals inside that box, entrusted to her by her father, the Rev. Clarence McConkey, United Methodist pastor (retired) of the Nebraska United Methodist Conference. They were the memories and evidence of a life well-lived, of a pastor devoted to the congregations he served, yet struggling each day to balance his parishioners' needs with those of his family and his own need for rejuvenation.



As Amy has described, "When I read Dad's journals, I recognized a parallel to my own vocational life that stopped me in my tracks. I read back over my own journals and realized how often my spirituality intersected with my vocation – how frequently I had written of my quest to recapture the original calling that brought me to this profession and for the energy to continue this rewarding, yet often heart-breaking, work with special-needs children and their families."

What resulted was a book that combined resources and personal reflections from a faith leader and a working professional. Whirlwinds and Small Voices is a seven-day cycle of spiritual renewal, paralleling the seven days of Creation, that captures Robbins' experience as a speech-language pathologist. The authors use anecdotes, personal reflections and quotations from secular and non-secular sources. The Rev. McConkey says, "Although it is written from the perspective of those in the serving professions, readers tell us the themes resonate with persons from all walks of life. How do we balance commitment to our work with our commitment to those we most care about: our own family and friends? How do we ensure that our family does not get just the left-overs of us, when we are spent at the end of a long work day?"

In a review of the book, noted author and editor Parker Palmer wrote, "Taking us through the rhythms of creation and re-creation, the authors remind us that our lives, however difficult they may become, are gifts – and that the only way to keep a gift alive is to keep passing it along. This book itself is a gift to us all."

Robbins said writing the book was a major breakthrough for her and has allowed her to relate more authentically to her patients and colleagues. "People are on a quest for jobs that sustain not only their checking accounts, but their deeper need for meaning in life. In our present economic climate, this quest may be more elusive than ever, yet sustaining one's spirit is surely more critical now than in better times.

The Cazadores cigar box with those journal entries sits in Amy's office, a sentry silently questioning her "Are you still committed to „hunting“ for a life where the inward and outward person are one? Are we "seekers" of renewal in this difficult economic climate, devoted to our work, but never forgetting the commitment to those most precious to us, and to the deeper meaning, in what we have chosen as our vocation?" (For more information: www.amymconkeyrobbins.com)