



Naomi Elswyk
Diocese of Sale

When Naomi was born prematurely in 1980 her prognosis for life was not good. When diagnosed with cerebral palsy at fifteen months, Naomi's parents realised she would probably be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. From an early age Naomi's indomitable spirit was very evident. She insisted on her own wheelchair from the age of three. She completed primary school at St. Kieran's and then attended Presentation College for her secondary years. Accessibility was always a challenge but one which was creatively and courageously met by both Naomi and her teachers. Naomi made her debut dancing in a wheelchair with the rest of her group. When she was in year 12, Naomi's father became very ill with an asbestos related cancer and he died in 1999 shortly after Naomi commenced university.

It seemed that Naomi would rise anew to each challenge which came her way. She learnt to drive by using a modified hand controlled car with a roof rack for her wheelchair. She studied at university graduating with a Bachelor of Social Welfare in 2002. She had employment at Telstra call centres, as a locum social worker at the local hospital and also at the local health centre. Naomi then returned to study to gain her Bachelor of Social Work from Monash University and went on to complete a second degree in Social Work.

At 28 years of age, Naomi is a well known member of our community. Within our Parish she produces funeral liturgy booklets for most of the funerals in the Parish; she is very computer literate and assists our Parish priests with computer glitches. Naomi does not consider herself to be disabled and refers to her wheelchair as her legs. She has been known to crawl into buildings if they are inaccessible.

In past years, Naomi received an award from the local Rotary Club and from the Rotary District. She also spoke at a Disability Day Breakfast at Monash University about her experiences as a disabled student entering the workforce. Naomi and her mother Rita, participated in the *We Have a Story* project, organised by the National Network for Disability and Spirituality and sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Naomi fits in a busy social life with an eclectic group of friends and plays wheelchair tennis for exercise. She is close to all her nieces and nephews and her older sisters and brothers-in-law. Last year Naomi travelled to the World Youth Day celebrations in Sydney with her mother and she participated with the other pilgrims from her Diocese. Currently Naomi is a case manager on the Bushfire Recovery team in Warragul, West Gippsland.

Adapted from the original submission written by Rita Elswyk for *We Have A Story*, © 2007 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.