From the Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music:

(If Larry Norman is to be called the father of Christian Rock, then Marsha Stevens certainly deserves to be known as the mother of contemporary Christian music, a title that *Christian Century* and others have bestowed upon her. She was the leader of what is considered to be the world’s first contemporary Christian music group, Children of the Day, and she has continued as a solo artist to produce albums of worship-oriented and edifying adult contemporary pop. As such, she remains the progenitor of what, by 2002, would become the single most popular genre in the contemporary Christian music market. Such artists as Susan Ashton, Margaret Becker, Amy Grant, Kim Hill, Twila Paris, Sandi Patty and Jaci Velasquez all sing in her shadow. Whether they know it or not, Marsha Stevens went before them to prepare the way – against odds they can scarcely imagine. A pioneer of pioneers, Stevens would be one of the only artists from the early Jesus movement to be still recording and touring full-time at the end of the millennium. And yet – she would remain virtually unknown to potential fans for her music, ostracized by an industry whose limits of ecumenicity had been tried and found wanting. The story of Marsha Stevens in many ways parallels the story of the Jesus movement itself. That revival began with spontaneous waves of spiritual renewal and impassioned piety; it ended with controlled legalism that replaced spiritual agendas with political ones. Whether the Jesus movement of the 1970’s morphed into the Religious Right of the 80’s or was killed by it is a matter of historical perspective. In any case, and whoever may be to blame, by the end of the 70’s, the Spirit had been quenched and revival was over. Stevens, who had perhaps typified the revival better than anyone else, was caught in the transition and became one of the first victims of the new order. Whatever one may think of the issues involved, the Christian music community’s rejection of Marsha Stevens remains an ugly mark on its legacy, and a prime example of its often unacknowledged sectarian character.

Born Marsha Carter, the talented performer wrote what would become Children of the Day’s classic hit, “*For Those Tears I Died (Come to the Water)”* when she was just sixteen. One of the most popular songs of the Jesus movement, “*For Those Tears I Died”* is a moving testimony to God’s saving grace, replete with images of baptism and liberation…the song was featured on what was destined to become the most important Christian music album of all time, Maranatha’s *The Everlastin’ Living Jesus Music Concert*, the record that put the Jesus movement revival into high gear, spreading its influence from Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa throughout the country and beyond. “For Those Tears I Died” became one of the best-known Christian folk songs of the decade. It would be translated into numbers of languages, recorded by countless artists and, for a time, could be found in practically every evangelical songbook in the country. No one in 1969 could have predicted it would have such influence in the decade ahead – much less that, for two decades beyond the, Christian congregations would be ripping the song out of their hymnals, systematically binding up the pages and mailing them off to Stevens as a symbol of the hostility they felt toward one who continued to love Jesus and sing His praises when they thought she was no longer entitled to do so…

Stevens became the first and as of 2002 (Jennifer Knapp came later), the only major singer in the Contemporary Christian music subculture to identify herself publicly as a lesbian…*Christian Century Magazine* has said that Stevens became “conservative Christianity’s worst nightmare – a Jesus-loving, Bible-believing, God-fearing lesbian Christian.”

Somewhat ironically, Stevens has continued to represent “the spirit of the Jesus movement” more faithfully than anyone else from that era. In the early ‘70s, Christian bands often traveled the country in vans or buses, playing wherever and whenever they could in exchange for a free-will offering and a chance to give their testimonies. Likewise, Stevens spent the (past several years) in an RV doing from 120-200 concerts a year…she eschews worldly possessions, fame, fortune and all the rest for the simple opportunity of telling the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

For her part, Marsha does not betray a shred of bitterness toward any of those who have opposed her and she does not seem to resent her exclusion from the contemporary music culture. She speaks tenderly of her former colleagues and respectfully of the leaders at…churches that have dismissed or denounced her… and she has found her calling…I write and sing contemporary Christian music for the LGBTQ community. It may be a narrow field, but hey, it’s *wide* open!”

Christian Century Magazine, from “Marsha’s Tears: An Orphan of the Church” –

“She is conservative Christianity’s worst nightmare: a Bible-believing, God-fearing, Jesus-loving lesbian Christian.”

Comments about Marsha’s Book “For Those Tears I Died”:

\*Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson, author, Moderator of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches UFMCC

Marsha Stevens tells the story of her encounter with the living God in the passionate days of the Jesus movement – a story that led her to trust the God who made her, and called her, ultimately, to claim her identity and mission as a Born Again Lesbian! This is a story of two movements, a world-class hymn, and the powerful intersection of grace, identity and calling. The faith that birthed “*For Those Tears I Died* (Come to the Water),” eventually birthed “Free to Be,” and so much more. From the almost surreal accounts of founding “Children of the Day,” and ministering with celebrities in the global Jesus movement concerts, to the humblest of venues, Marsha is courageously authentic. She is the “mother of contemporary Christian music,” who was at the very center and then driven to the margins. A prophetic poet and lyricist, she never stops reaching out to those who are not sure they can trust God, church or themselves. Her message, is, always, “of course you can!” Of all the things that live on after us, Marsha's music may be what best captures all that we tried to be and do for our community.

\*Rev. Freda Smith, clergy person who performed the first U.S. same-sex wedding conducted with a government-issued civil marriage license in Denver, Colorado for Richard Adams and Anthony Sullivan in 1975. The marriage is still listed on the Colorado Bureau of Records website.

*For Those Tears I Died* by Marsha Stevens-Pino is a must-read autobiography by an uniquely gifted songwriter and artist whose music and ministry has touched and changed our world.

"Music builds the Church" is an expression my congregation heard every Sunday as I introduced special music directly before I preached. I knew that nothing opened hearts and minds to a message of love, power, and possibilities as effectively as the subtle touch of song. My church loved Marsha's music long before she entered MCC. She was a spiritual rock star in the Evangelical Christian world, a global traveler who appeared with the contemporary "greats" of the time. After she appeared at the UFMCC General Conference in 1985 and told her story, whenever she was near Sacramento our growing church insisted on her presence among us. I give Marsha credit for being a positive factor in the growth of Sacramento MCC. As a denominational leader of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches I was repeatedly touched and strengthened by her musical ministry to the entire denomination. I give Marsha due credit, also, for the rapid growth of the denomination as she ministered to us at Conferences. Music does build the church. Marsha's book, *For Those Tears I Died* (Come to the Water), goes behind the scenes, beyond the glitter of public appearances and acclaim, to introduce us to a very deep and real survivor who by the power and grace of her faith has overcome.

“*That spark that would not die was You, that strength to finally grieve,*

*The faithfulness to feel the pain, yet still believe...”*

\*Rev. Elder Troy Perry, pioneer civil rights activist, Founder of UFMCC – the largest LGBTQ organization in the world: I consider Marsha a colleague and one of my closest friends, but she is also a pioneer in her own right. One thing quickly learned by any pioneer is that there is no one there to cheer when you arrive. Marsha has forged a path for hundreds of Contemporary Christian Music artists and thousands of wounded Christians to find their way back to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I’ve ministered with her in four countries and watched her music and storytelling lighten hearts, open eyes, and spark recognition of the presence of God’s Holy Spirit in people who thought they would never feel that spark again.

She wrote a song for me called Lead This Pioneer and I knew she was a kindred spirit when it said,

“*I left behind the life I knew, the easy choices gone.*

*The warmth would lure me back, but fire leads me on.”*

Reading her story reminds me of the passion of those years of the Jesus Movement and the legacy that Jesus music left for us. I didn’t meet Marsha until a few weeks after she came out as a lesbian Christian, but I knew of her music and recognized her the first time she walked into a church where I was preaching. I knew from that moment that the path would be smoother, the way more clear, and the truth more accessible to the LGBTQ community we were both committed to reaching. She paid the price before anybody else in the Christian music world and I will never forget it.

And I knew without any doubt, as I told her that night, that she had come into the realm of God for just such a time as this.”

Mel White: Author (Stranger at the Gate), Activist (Founder of Soul Force)

“I’ve been moved by her powerful voice and passionate presence on platforms we’ve shared across the nation.”

Rev. Dr. Nancy Wilson: Author, Activist, former Moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches

“Of all the things that live on after us, Marsha’s music may be what best captures all that we tried to be and do for our community.”