

FEBRUARY 2017

# SOUNDINGS



Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Charlotte

DISCOVER DEEPER SPIRITUAL MEANING

*Depth through reflection*

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Collaborative Mural at the Hyatt House in Uptown Charlotte, photographed by Daman Abrams

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as I live it is my privilege—my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I love.

— GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



*The Mission of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte is to inspire children, youth and adults to discover and articulate deeper spiritual meaning evidenced in lives of integrity, compassion and stewardship of the earth.*

*La mision de la iglesia Unitaria Universalista de Charlotte es inspirar a los niños, jóvenes y adultos para que descubran y articulan un significado espiritual profundo, evidente en una vida de integridad, compasión y en el manejo de los recursos de la tierra*

## A SLOW BURN TO COMMITMENT

by Camilla Mazzotta

When asked to share a reflection on commitment, my first reaction was, “I don’t think you’ve got the right person.” Never have I thought of myself as one whose life is directed by such focused and sustained concern. I hold those I consider committed folks with an especially high regard. To me, these are the protesters, nonprofit workers, foundation creators, and so on, who live and breathe altruism. But before I gave into a knee-jerk response by turning down the invitation, I went into introspection mode. My conclusion was that although I’m not a mover and a shaker, over the years I’ve nurtured a slow, positive burn while learning from my mistakes.

My thoughts focused on my vocation as a children’s librarian in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools. But, the path to this 15-year career was long and circuitous, not a perceived goal from the beginning. In one of my first jobs out of college, I witnessed unprofessional management that resulted in large staff turnover. I quit too, but not without filing a grievance. I met with legal and executive types to no avail and became one more soul in their revolving door. I was jobless, but 20-something-me felt good about trying to make a difference. In retrospect, this was the beginning of my inner smolder. Working in a place that treated its employees without dignity and respect was intolerable.

Fast forward . . . I worked for a national insurance company for close to ten years. It provided a solid salary to help support my new family but, except for my wonderful coworkers, did nothing for my heart and soul. To borrow an expression of the times, I felt like I was “working for the man” and, worse, a sell-out. When circumstances called for a move to Charlotte, I was relieved to bail out. Life lesson number two: my core values needed to be reflected in my vocation to feel fulfilled.

With my family less dependent upon mom-time, I took my past work experiences to heart and pursued a librarianship degree in my late 40s. This decision was based largely on the positive experiences I had as a child in my town’s public library. My hope was to offer the same to kids in public schools. And since a library can be



Camilla Mazzotta

so many things—a place of information, entertainment, restoration, guidance, inspiration—my belief was, and still is, that no matter your needs, you can find it in a library. Who couldn’t get behind that? Finally, the right move!

Challenges over the years have disgruntled but not defeated me. I am more at peace with the space and resources I use while on this earth because there is a better balance between what I take and what I offer with my work. Above all, I relish curating an elementary print collection that speaks to kids in all their wonderful diversity. It occurs to me that it’s partly selfish to feed on my small successes when books and kids connect. Watching Nevaeh rush to get her hands on a Mo Willems book for its pure hilarity. Witnessing Medhini excitedly check out a nonfiction title that details her home country. Or locating a sign language book for Seli, who hopes to communicate with her deaf aunt who’ll visit soon. Just the best! I strive to create a library that excites and enthuses, that surprises kids with new and unexpected relationships with books. With that always in mind, I remain committed to my job because I believe it is one worth doing.

## THE FIRE OF COMMITMENT

by Cindy Thomson



To me, a commitment is a promise. I'm reminded of the Girl Scout round I learned as a youngster:

*When'er you make a promise,  
Consider well its importance  
And when made  
Engrave it upon you heart.*

Growing up, I was taught to keep my promises. When I agree to do something, I do it. I'm not bragging. Sometimes it feels like a fault. Not everyone keeps their promises and they know when to quit, but not me. I think I am driven more than most to keep my commitments.

Then there is the commitment to a cause. Equal rights for women, with its many intersections, has always been my cause. My passion began in my childhood when fairness, not only for me but for those who could not advocate for themselves, was most important. Limitations placed on girls never seemed fair to me; I could never accept them. Growing up in the 1950s, I was called a "tom boy"—there were so many things girls were not supposed to do. As a teen I learned that some boys didn't want a girlfriend who would compete with them. Later, I learned what workplace discrimination was all about.

As a young woman, I became active with a feminist organization, the National Organization for Women (NOW). My involvement in NOW has given me the vehicle to fight for the many issues important to me as a woman. While many victories have been achieved over the years, the fight is far from over.

Recently, I was asked to portray a UU feminist for a Children and Youth Religious Education event. I chose Lucy Stone. At first I chose her because she did not take her husband's last name when she married in 1854. She is among the first American women celebrated for doing so. I related to her because I kept my birth name when I married. Lucy Stone was a famous abolitionist and suffragist with a gift for oration. She and her husband went around the

country working to convince people that women should be full citizens with the right to vote. As I researched her life, it became clear that Stone's commitment meant never giving up. She did not live long enough to be able to vote herself, but her daughter did.

Now that there is such opposition to feminist causes, we must continue to work for equal rights. Even in the darkest times, I continue to be optimistic about the future. I am inspired by a quote by Susan B. Anthony, one of many who insisted our voices be heard: "Never another season of silence!"



Women's March on Washington  
 photograph courtesy of Kathryn Whitfield



Jay Leach

With the possible exception of *Annie Hall*, there's no movie I've watched or thought about more than the 1983 film *The Big Chill*. In it, seven college friends come back together to mourn the death by suicide of another of their friends.

Over a weekend together, they reflect on their idealism, their current lives, and the considerable distance that lies between the two. When they were young students together, to what were they committed? Now, several years later, with marriages, divorces, children, careers, competing demands on their time, to what are they committed?

Sam and Harold joke about how wealthy they've become, smirking, "good thing it doesn't mean anything to us." Meg admits she left a principled practice as a public defender to become a corporate attorney whose clients are, as she says, "only raping the earth." Michael variously defends and decries his vacuous role as a journalist for *People* magazine.

The movie's title is drawn from a head-shaking admission from Meg early on in their reunion: "It's a cold world out there. Sometimes I feel like I'm getting a little frosty myself."

Nick, a Vietnam vet turned drug dealer, serves as their cynic, deriding not just their current lives but their university days as well. Dismissing their youthful ideals as little more than the easy principles of the privileged, he lashes out mockingly:

It was easy back then. No one had a cushier berth than we did. It's not surprising our friendship could survive that. It's only out there in the real world that it gets tough.

And later, with his hard edge, he'll lecture them: "Wise up, folks. We're all alone out there and tomorrow we're going out there again."

Maybe, in part, what made *The Big Chill* a quirky sort of classic—maybe, in part, what keeps me coming back to it—is the challenging way it asks us to reflect on our own ideals. How does the distance between our youthful visions of what could be and the way our lives are now reflect necessary compromises or indulgent self-centeredness? What commitments have we sustained? What commitments have we jettisoned? And why?

Who of us doesn't engage, at times, in the kind of reflections we hear from these grieving classmates? Back when I was young and imagined how the world could be, to what did I claim to be committed? Have I sustained my ideals with integrity? Has life required

me to make compromises? Do my early imaginings strike me now as naïve and simplistic, not substantive enough to endure the "cold world out there"?

We come to a time in the life of our congregation in which we are being asked to engage in this kind of personal introspection. Lofty ideals are inspiring. Professed values are inspiring. Grand visions are inspiring. But, are they real parts of our lives?



photograph by Nancy Pierce

If you were to ask those who know you best, "To what do I seem most deeply committed?" how might they respond? If you were to assess the use of your time, what would that say about your most important commitments? If you were to look at how you allocate your financial resources, what would that say about what matters most to you?

We aren't "all alone out there." And, while it may be a "cold world out there," we here come together to comfort and challenge one another. This clearing in the forest of our lives exists because of our individual and collective commitment to it. What does your support say about your commitment?

*Our spiritual journey begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. We invite parents to use the material presented in LET'S DIVE IN! to engage their children in this journey.*

## LOGAN LENDS A HAND

by Belinda Parry

Logan couldn't wait for his tenth birthday. He would finally be old enough to volunteer with his mom at the animal shelter. She had promised to switch her volunteer day from her usual Wednesday to Saturday that week so he could go with her. He loved the stories his mom shared over dinner about the animals she had cared for and looked forward to telling some of his own. Once, Logan had asked his mom why she didn't get a job at the shelter, and she said that she volunteered so the shelter could use their money for things volunteers couldn't do.

Saturday morning after his birthday, Logan was up, dressed, and in the kitchen eating breakfast when his mom came downstairs. She smiled to see him ready to go, grabbed some breakfast, and they were out the door.

The shelter staff was already working hard when they arrived. Logan and his mom got right to work cleaning cages and feeding cats. Then Logan played with the kittens while his mom did some paperwork. After that, they took dogs for walks while another volunteer cleaned the kennels. Logan got to walk a scruffy little dog whose perky ears and floppy tongue made her look like she was smiling. She danced around Logan's feet, happy to be out of her kennel. When they were finished walking, Logan's mom helped with some office work. The staff let Logan bring the little dog into the back room and play fetch with a soft red ball while he waited for his mom to finish. Then it was time to go home.

Logan didn't want to leave the little dog. He asked his mom if they could adopt her, but she reminded him that his sister was allergic and said their yard was too small for such a lively animal. She said that someone with space and love to spare would adopt her soon. Logan hoped that was true.

All weekend, Logan thought about the dog and all the animals at the shelter. His mom said some of the bigger dogs and older cats had been there a long time or had come from other shelters where they'd spent most of

their lives. He was glad that this shelter gave those animals a place to live and wondered how else he could help. Then he had an idea. He would raise money for the shelter!



photograph by Debbie Ostrin

Logan made posters and wrote an email about the shelter and all the animals' needs. He asked people to contribute money or supplies to help. He got permission to hang the posters on the community bulletin board at church and in the parent room at school. His parents sent the email to people they knew. When Logan talked to his friends at school about raising money, they wanted to help the shelter and asked their families and friends to contribute. Soon Logan had \$150, as

well as food, blankets, and beds to give to the shelter. The staff at the shelter was thrilled. Logan's hard work had paid off!

Now, school is out for the summer. Logan goes with his mom every Wednesday to care for the animals, and he is already making plans for another, bigger fundraiser in the fall.

### Let's Talk About It:

- Volunteering once a week is a major commitment, especially with a busy schedule. Why do you think Logan and his mom are willing to do this?
- Values include things like honesty, justice, responsibility, and kindness. What values do you think are important to Logan? What values are important to you and how do you live them out through your actions?

## *Elizabeth's Melody*

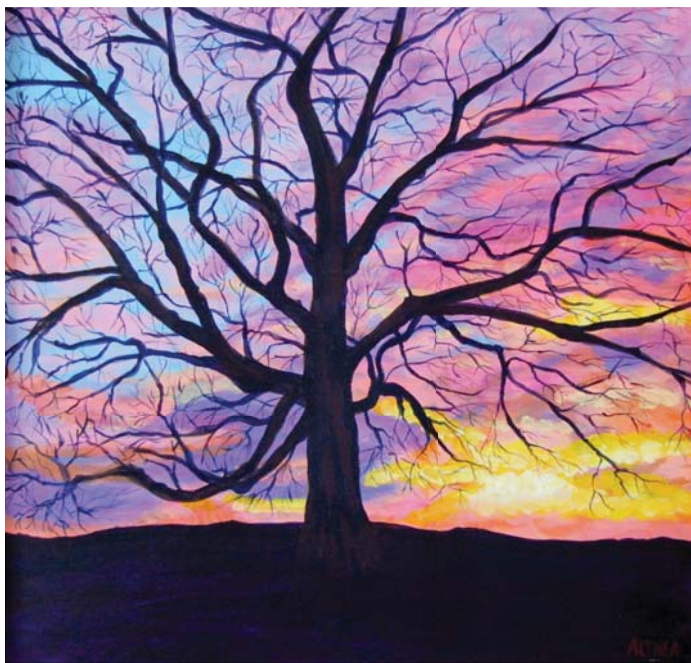
Long fingers pick out the tune,  
deft as a canner packing fruit.  
A voice, granite rich and husky,  
croons in a way that brings to mind  
three centuries of buried hopes and  
a pack-a-day habit.

She would have liked to see the world,  
sing her songs in cafés alive  
with people drinking night;  
mix still water from a bay  
into her long laments;  
wake ancestors half a world away  
with the sounds of  
ballads stolen, then returned.

But she was held here by children  
who needed a mother to buy  
their clothes, their father long gone.  
When you've got a hard row to hoe,  
you set to it.  
Then her relatives needed tending,  
sacred duty in these hills. And maybe  
she just needed the sound of  
wind moving through the pines  
on the ridge behind her home.

She knows where she wants to be buried.  
Right here, in this plot  
overlooking the road,  
where people passing by can read her tombstone:  
Elizabeth \_\_\_\_\_, Family Historian.  
Singer of old songs.  
Mother who never ran away  
except on strings of steel.

– Glenda Bailey Mershon



acrylic painting by Althea Clark  
photographed by Elsa Lafferty

## UUCC

### ENDS Statements

AS A CONGREGATION, WE COURAGEOUSLY NAME  
THESE ENDS TO WHICH WE ASPIRE:

- We are a joyful, dynamic community of people who care about and are connected to each other. Here people are welcomed, heard, included and respected.
- We are a sanctuary for those on a liberal religious path and a beacon of progressive thought and action in the larger Charlotte community.
- We cultivate lives of generosity and responsibility, sharing our personal abundance.
- We are intentionally growing in our diversity as a congregation, each of us working with others to overcome the barriers that divide the human family.
- We strive for peace, justice and equity in our hearts, our interpersonal relationships, our community and our world.

## Words that Commit: A Timeline

"I'll move," I decide,  
loading my tan Chevette.  
What have I got to lose?  
Cats yowling beside me, years stuffed in boxes,  
my beloved Minnesota disappears in the rearview.

"I should," I say.  
Interest rates are low, I'm sick of  
creepy landlords and paint restrictions.  
Still, it's like signing my freedom away.

"I do," I murmur, sweating in white.

"Why not," I breathe.  
The moon's full, the night warm, I'm near 40.  
I imagine the dark-haired boy  
I'll conceive in shadows near our garden,  
throw caution to the wind.

"I can't anymore," I cry. Too hard.  
We argue over laundry, roll apart in bed,  
Spin each other's words in resentful circles.  
Then by surprise, his lips brush my neck and  
I'm washed again by his gentle way.  
We're bound by history together,  
Bedrock laid by years of hard love.  
Too much to lose.

"I must," I whisper after the election.  
Daily sledgehammer of hate targets our rights,  
Lives of people I love. It assaults my values,  
Sense of fairness, our Democracy.  
I awake at 3 tasting despair, wondering:  
How could my small voice even matter?

"I will," I declare.  
I march into a sea of pink hats, bodies pressed close.  
We stand for justice together, fists and voices raised.  
I feel it, this power rolling outward—  
My heart opens to possibility.

– Lisa Marcoff Lackey



Collaborative Mural at the Hyatt House in Uptown Charlotte  
(Mural contributors include, Sherry Sample, Usama Ringo Taha Hussain, Beth Mussay and Daman Abrams)

## FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

*Below you will find a list of books, reflections, movies, lectures and much more for further engagement on the subject of Commitment.*

### BOOKS:

#### Adult

- An Examined Faith, Social Context and Religious Commitment*, by James Luther Adams, 1995
- The Long Walk to Freedom*, by Nelson Mandela, 1995
- Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, by Robert N. Bellah, William M. Sullivan, Steven M. Tipton, Richard Madsen, Ann Swidler, 1996
- The Common Fire, Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*, by Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, Sharon Daloz Parks, 1997
- The Committed Life: Principles for Good Living from Our Timeless Past*, by Esther Jungreis, 1999
- Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life*, by Steven C. Hayes, Spencer Smith, 2005
- The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of the Legendary Catholic Social Activist*, by Dorothy Day, Daniel Berrigan, 2009
- Between Two Worlds: My Life and Captivity in Iran*, by Roxana Saberi, 2010
- I Am Malala*, by Malala Yousafzai, Christina Lamb, 2013
- March: Books 1-3*, by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, 2013-2016
- A Fighting Chance*, by Elizabeth Warren, 2014
- The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, by Austen Ivereigh, 2014
- Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War (Companion to the Ken Burns Documentary)*, by Artemis Joukowsky, 2016

#### Preschool/ Early Elementary

- The Carrot Seed*, by Ruth Krauss, 1945
- Matthew's Dream*, by Leo Lionni, 1995
- Stuck*, by Oliver Jeffers, 2012
- The Quickest Kid in Clarksville*, by Pat Zietlow Miller, 2016

#### Older Elementary

- Mirette on the High Wire*, by Emily Arnold McCully, 1992
- The Value of Commitment: The Story of Jacques Cousteau*, by Ann Donegan Johnson, 1998

*Shiloh*, by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, 2000

*Salt in His Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of a Dream*, by Deloris Jordan, 2003

*The Way I Act*, by Steve Metzger, 2011

*Amazing Grace*, by Mary Hoffman, 2007

*The Paperboy*, by Dav Pilkey, 2016

*Armstrong: The Adventurous Journey of a Mouse to the Moon (edition 2016)*, by Torben Kuhlmann, 2016

*Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman*, by Kathleen Krull, 2000

#### Middle-High School

*Winterdance: The Fine Madness of Running the Iditarod*, by Gary Paulsen, 1995

*The Chocolate War*, by Robert Cormier, 2004

*Letters from Rifka*, by Karen Hesse, 2009

*Out Of The Dust*, by Karen Hesse, 2009

*The Flip Side*, by Shawn Johnson, 2016

*The Boys in the Boat (Young Readers Adaptation): The True Story of an American Team's Epic Journey to Win Gold at the 1936 Olympics*, by Daniel James Brown, 2016

### MOVIES:

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1962

*Conrack*, 1974 (PG)

*Gandhi*, 1982 (PG)

*Silkwood*, 1983 (R)

*Glory*, 1989 (R)

*The Road to Freedom: The Vernon Johns Story*, 1994 (PG)

*Kolya*, 1996 (PG-13)

*Billy Elliot*, 2000 (R)

*Milk*, 2008 (R)

*Selma*, 2014 (PG-13)

*Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War, 2016 (Documentary)*

*Loving*, 2016 (PG-13)

*Timbuktu*, 2014 (PG-13)



## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS OF ART, POETRY, AND READINGS:

### ***Collaborative Mural (Daman Abrams, Usama Ringo Taha Hussain, Beth Mussay and Sherry Sample)***

After the Keith Lamont Scott shooting, the uptown Hyatt House welcomed community members to paint on their boarded up windows. Sherry felt moved to participate and knew that Beth had been working on ink portraits of people who had been killed or harmed due to systematic racism. They decided to work together combining Sherry's love of collaborative work, painting and mixed media, with Beth's amazing skill in portraiture.

As folks walked by, they were invited to contribute, knowing that many voices would make a stronger piece. Daman and Usama had both traveled from other cities to participate in the movement of protesting yet another shooting of an unarmed black man. Usama is Muslim and told of his many experiences of being black, Muslim and the treatment he receives for having the name Usama Hussain. He added some beautiful words and phrases in Arabic, as well as a radiating an incredible love of life. Daman added inspiring quotes and phrases centering on how your actions must match your ideals and show what you stand for. Many others added a word, idea or painted images as they walked by and paint was left out for the rest of the day.

The result was a beautiful collaboration of community, eager for the therapeutic quality of having an outlet to express themselves.



Beth Mussay, Usama Ringo Taha Hussain, Daman Abrams and Sherry Sample



### ***Glenda Bailey Mershon***

Glenda Bailey-Mershon is a poet, essayist, novelist, cultural historian, and activist who has explored in poetry and fiction the experience of mixed heritage. Her published works include the novel, *Eve's Garden*; *Bird Talk: Poems*; *saconige/ blue smoke: Poems from the*

*Southern Appalachians*; *A History of the American Women's Movement: A Study Guide*.

### ***Althea Clark***

In 2003, Althea took her first acrylic painting course at Worcester Art Museum with Bill Griffiths. Most of her paintings have some connection to her life. They either commemorate trips taken or beloved places. She has had one painting in a juried show and painted one commission piece, and of course many are scattered amongst friends.



### ***Lisa Marcoff Lackey***

Lisa Marcoff Lackey has loved writing all of her life, from short stories and essays to poetry. Lisa is happy to work in an elementary school library, surrounded by words and children eager to hear them read aloud. She can be found outside with her hands in the dirt or practicing yoga, and she's the last to leave anywhere there is a song to be sung.



### ***Nancy Pierce***

UUC member Nancy Pierce has worked as a documentary photographer all her adult life. Her client list reflects her interests in land and water protection, sustainable communities, active transportation, social justice and the common good. She

has photographed General Assembly for the Unitarian Universalist Association every year since 1993.

# SOUNDINGS

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