

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018

SOUNDINGS



Unitarian Universalist
Church of Charlotte

DISCOVER DEEPER SPIRITUAL MEANING

Depth through reflection

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“The Good Samaritans” by Jules Pascin, 1917

I am open and I am willing,
For to be hopeless would seem so strange.
It dishonors those who go before us,
So lift me up to the light of change.

—FROM *I AM WILLING*; LYRICS BY HOLLY NEAR



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 misión 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

“OPEN AND WILLING:” MOVING TOWARDS COURAGEOUS CONNECTIONS

by Eve Stevens



This summer we explored the times when we have made courageous connections and how those connections changed the way we understood ourselves and our place in the world. We reflected together on experiences when we realized that we were not the expert and had to set aside our preconceptions and turn to “beginner’s mind,” opening ourselves to new learning instead.

We heard personal stories from UUCC members and staff about what we risk, what must be lost, and what we gain when we seek transformative relationships and experiences.

In this edition of *Soundings*, we’ve compiled excerpts from explorations of our summer theme in Worship, CYRE and ARE/SD. Among others, you’ll find stories of members leaving the familiarity of their childhood faith to then risk opening their hearts to Unitarian Universalism and stories of members leaving behind the expertise earned through years in one career and finding themselves learning anew in a different field. You’ll read about the programming that had our adult members exploring ways to “empty their cups,” and our children and youth’s exploration of how to be open-minded learners in the community.

This summer we experimented with reaching out beyond the place where we know everything, the place where we are right. As Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai puts it:

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.
The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard
But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined house
Once stood.



“Monks in an Alleyway” (1922-1925)
image from the German avant-garde painter
Anita Rée (1885 – 1933).

We hope our summer series has inspired you to reflect on the relationships and experiences that have shown you a new and different reality as we prepare to make the courageous connections beyond our congregation that will allow us to partner in the work of spiritual, social and environmental transformation.

We look forward to continuing the journey with you.

Gratefully,
Eve Stevens, Minister

“Open and Willing”: Moving Toward Courageous Connections

Sunday, July 1

Rev. Jay Leach, Minister; Judy Weingarten, Lay Service Leader
“Open and Willing”: Moving Toward Courageous Connections

Listen to the service here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFDu0kGPOGc>

Sunday, July 8

Bob Bushorn & Edie Gelber-Beechler, Lay Service Leaders
Beginner’s Mind

Listen to the service here: <http://www.uuccharlotte.org/learn-more/sermons/>

Sunday, July 15

Rev. Eve Stevens, Minister; Cindy Hostetler, Lay Service Leader
Good Company

Listen to the service here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWw6d6EQ0xY>

Sunday, July 22

Manny Allen and Vivian Brenner, Lay Service Leaders
Trusting a New Spiritual Community

Listen to the service here: <http://www.uuccharlotte.org/learn-more/sermons/>

Sunday, July 29

Rev. Jay Leach, Senior Minister; Carole Ellis, Lay Service Leader
“And who is my neighbor?”

Listen to the service here: <http://www.uuccharlotte.org/learn-more/sermons/>

Sunday, August 5

Thomas Cole, Lisa Lackey and Camilla Mazzotta, Lay Service Leaders
“Adapting and Thriving in Times of Change: A Librarian’s Perspective”

Listen to the service here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnARsDCAbE8>

Sunday, August 12

Rev. Eve Stevens, Minister; Michael Lovett, Lay Service Leader
Leaving the Familiar

Listen to the service here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le3PG7JPICI>

Sunday, August 19

Kathleen Carpenter, Marsha Kelly and Elsa Lafferty, Lay Service Leaders
The Experience of Living in Another Country: Three Different Perspectives

Listen to the service here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jct4QgG6HHE>

Sunday, August 27

The Professional Staff

“Open and Willing”: Preparing for Courageous Connections

Listen to the service here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gK_Ch_O5SK8

Sunday, September 2

Kaarin Record Leach and Rebekah Visco, Lay Service Leaders
Starting Over

Listen to the service here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w98NmgVrJMQ>

MOVING TOWARD COURAGEOUS CONNECTIONS

by Martha Kniseley



If you spent the past year deeply immersed in learning about Environmental and Racial Justice, you may have looked forward to the summer months as a vacation for your heart and mind. But we offered you something different—asking you to consider how we

could be “open and willing as we move toward courageous connections.” That might sound a bit audacious, but we know how to take small steps as we internalize the real learning experiences. We invited you to come as new learners; we asked that you arrive with your empty cups. This played out on Sunday mornings after the services as we participated in fun, interactive activities to get to know each other better, and in experiential classes such as *The Tree of Life* where the group created their own personal spirit trees and then connected all of them as a forest. One participant reported that it gave her “the opportunity to reflect on her support systems, abilities, and important people throughout.”

We continue to have a hunger for connecting with each other within our own congregation with the realization that this deepening connection will support us as we begin new work of partnering in the community in the coming year. *Building Rituals & Connections with Friends* was a class we created because of a need expressed by one member. She obviously spoke for others who said that this class was “the perfect balance of spirituality and joy, connection and introspection,” and that these connections are a spiritual practice in and of themselves.

For the third year we included a popular session that gives us the opportunity to hear from other members as they reflect on the summer topic. All three presenters shared challenging situations they found themselves in. A member came away with the understanding that “they were not just surviving them but discovering meaningful connections with people from other cultures—the affirmation that we are part of a larger world.” We also heard of the necessity for self-care and the support of this spiritual community.

Eighteen members participated in a 3-part series—*First, Empty Your Cup*—intended to help them prepare for deeper listening and receptivity to others as we build new relationships and alliances in and for our community. They “explored ways to ‘empty their cups’ using contemplative practices, walking meditation and readings around the themes of humility, curiosity, the beginner’s mind and letting go of preconceived notions.”



painting by Edie Gelber-Beechler

One of the participants found this reading particularly powerful and worth considering as we embark on another year of deep learning and partnering in our community:

Active Hope is not wishful thinking.
Active Hope is not waiting to be rescued
by the Lone Ranger or some savior.
Active Hope is waking up to the beauty of life
on whose behalf we can act.
We belong to this world.
The web of life is calling us forth at this time.
We’ve come a long way and are here to play our part.
With Active Hope we realize that there are
adventures in store,
strengths to discover, and comrades to link arms with.
Active Hope is a readiness to discover the strengths
in ourselves and in others;
a readiness to discover the reasons for hope
and the occasions for love.
A readiness to discover the size and strength of our
hearts,
our quickness of mind, our steadiness of purpose,
our own authority, our love for life,
the liveliness of our curiosity,
the unsuspected deep well of patience and diligence,
the keenness of our senses, and our capacity to lead.
None of these can be discovered in an armchair or
without risk.

—Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone, from *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in Without Going Crazy*, 2012.

MOVING TOWARD COURAGEOUS CONNECTIONS

by Kathleen Carpenter



This summer’s congregational theme allowed us to move deeper into exploration of our Vision of transformation by reminding us of the importance of creating connections, and more specifically, courageous connections. How did that translate to programming for

our children? It meant asking our kids to try new things, to work with and learn from people they didn’t know, to talk about relationships, and to respectfully listen to the stories and experiences of others.

Preschool/K: “I wonder what this story has to do with relationships and what we can learn from it?”

Each of our Preschool/K classes began with one of our two coordinators, Josie Parry and Tennah Murphy, introducing the morning’s story with these words: “This summer we are talking about relationships—how we are connected to our families and friends, with people we know here and at school, with people we don’t know, and with the Earth and everything on it. We will think about and talk about the question: ‘What can I learn from this?’” Each story was followed by “wondering questions,” inviting our children to reflect on the story without leading them into pre-determined answers. Here is an example of the books that were read and the wondering questions. *Tacky the Penguin* by Helen Lester

- I wonder if you have a friend who likes to do something or somethings differently than you do...
- I wonder if there is anything that you do differently than everyone else...
- I wonder what the world would be like if everyone did everything the same way all the time...

Elementary

Elementary class coordinator, Melanie Greely, summarized the Summer experience:

The Elementary class met to continue their religious education in a more casual setting. Throughout July and August, we focused on the congregational theme “Open and Willing: Moving Toward Courageous Connections.” Each week, the children met a special guest to learn a new skill or concept. They were encouraged to rely on each other to work in teams and stretch their comfort zones by trying new things. During crafts such as cooking and Legos, students learned that when we work as a community, the work is lighter. Participants learned about the various connections to be made in Charlotte that help protect nature through our lessons in beekeeping and unicorn “poop.” Most importantly, children built connections with each other by relying on the help of others in crafts requiring fine motor skills and synthesizing of new information. Each lesson was linked to our UU principles, most commonly “We help each other learn” and “We protect the interdependent web of life.”

Middle School

Each week, two volunteers introduced themselves to our youth, lit a chalice, and shared these words: “We light our chalice to remind us that we are all learners and that learning together is an opportunity for growth and connection.” The first two sessions centered on creativity and identity as the youth designed a zentangle mosaic.

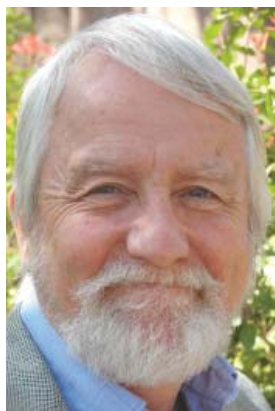
Subsequent classes invited participants to create with pen, wood, paper, recycled plastic, cameras, and their voices and bodies. They also learned from backpackers and members of the differently-abled community, and by participating in an outdoor service project. Some of the youth knew some of the leaders, but for most it was a wonderful opportunity for new connections.



“Path among a Chain of Yellow Dunes” (1932-1933) image from the German avant-garde painter Anita Rée (1885 – 1933).

“BEGINNER’S MIND”

by Bob Bushorn



“Beginner’s mind” as I understand it doesn’t mean to abandon our knowledge nor to blank out our thoughts and opinions to have a literally empty cup. Beginner’s mind, or mindfulness, is not absence but presence of awareness of whatever is there. The “don’t know” mind as I understand it is to loosen the clinging, the certainty and attachment. This is doable—we can “step back.” We can learn

to see thoughts and opinions through the space of mindfulness, not fixed and final. We can see our thoughts and opinions as though from behind the waterfall of our own stream of consciousness. They are useful and pragmatic like a boat that can help us cross the stream, but the boat isn’t the stream, and it’s not the destination. Zen folks would say our words (and opinions) are just fingers pointing at the moon.

Victor Frankl wrote, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” That buffer is the space between of mindfulness.

From Ajahn Chah, we hear, “You have so many opinions. And you suffer so much from them. Why not let them go?”

And from the Buddha (perhaps saying this with a smile, inviting us to laugh at ourselves) “Seeing misery in those who cling to views, a wise person should not adopt any of them. A wise person does not by opinions become arrogant. But those who grasp after views and opinions wander about the world annoying everyone.” Hopefully, as we cultivate connections for justice we won’t be wandering the city annoying everyone!

There are many ways to cultivate mindfulness or the beginners mind. The traditional way is through formal meditation, but perhaps it could be done through taking a walk with a child and getting into their mind space, or becoming totally absorbed in the natural world and a long quiet walk or run each morning. It could be the quiet deep listening kind of prayer or through deeply, humbly listening to someone else’s viewpoint with a space, the buffer between hearing and responding....

What I want to say is just this: when we cling to our own opinions and views, it weighs us down (and sometimes we annoy everyone). We have the freedom to hold our palms lightly open—an important aspect of being ready to “cultivate connections” with respect and humility. May we connect with the courage of humility and the wisdom of a beginner’s mind.



photograph by mendhak, Flickr

“BEGINNER’S MIND”

by Edie Gelber-Beechler



According to Shunryu Suzuki, author of *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, the goal of Zen meditation practice is to “always keep our beginner’s mind.” “If your mind is empty,” he writes, “it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s mind there are few.”

I know a lot. I’m an expert at what I think. I judge things. I know that I don’t like baseball, but if I had to choose a team, it’d be the Mets. (Sorry, Jay.) I judge certain political figures as beneficial or dangerous. I judge drivers who share their really loud bass when they’re next to me at a red light.

I’m really good at judging. Recently, when I was sitting in a carrel at the library writing this, the lady in the next carrel started making phone calls. I was annoyed, and judged her to be inconsiderate. Then I judged myself for being selfish and annoyed. Then I judged myself for judging.

When I judge, I am light years away from beginner’s mind. First of all, maybe I’m not enough of an “expert” to make a judgment about a particular issue. But, more importantly, seeing things as black or white puts up a wall between me and the other. In fact, if I am part of an interconnected web of life—and I believe that I am—then the wall that I put up actually creates other. Shunryu Suzuki writes that “the most important thing is not to be dualistic.” And when I judge, when I put up walls, I separate myself from the world.

I’d like to share a way that helps me remember to stop judging, and brings me back to beginner’s mind. You may have seen people bow and say

“Namaste.” “Namaste” is often interpreted as meaning “The divine in me honors the divine in you.” (If you squirm at the word, “divine,” feel free to substitute another word, maybe “love” or “light”. I do.) Shunryu Suzuki says that bowing helps us “give up our dualistic ideas.” It helps eradicate those boundaries, those walls we build, and reminds us of our interconnectedness, which, in turn, leads to a compassionate mind. He says that “the beginner’s mind is the mind of compassion, it is boundless... Then we are always true to ourselves, in sympathy with all beings...”

I’m usually too shy to bow and say Namaste out loud, but I say it in my heart. When I do, I envision a shimmering light in me honoring—and merging with—the shimmering light in all.

Namaste



painting by Edie Gelber-Beechler

TRUSTING A NEW CHURCH COMMUNITY

by Manny Allen



My spirituality began with my parents and grandparents who were staunch church attendees. I was 16, and my brothers were 15 and 11 when our mother passed in 1963. We were assured by our church family that they would be there for us.

During that period the KKK marched in Raleigh. We three were politically active and followed doctrines of Dr.

King and the Black Panther Party, while listening to the propaganda of Jessie Helms. The assassination of Dr. King brought a feeling of hopelessness, and our church family was nowhere to be found.

We experienced mainstream America as a contradiction: civil rights laws were passed, but at the same time our neighborhood was being overwhelmed with drugs. Our community did not have the resources to bring in these drugs, where did they come from? It appeared law enforcement used it as another way to suppress and control.

My brother and I were hired by IBM in 1966. My world of black and white came to an end. It was in the Research Triangle that I first met a Mormon. Once he felt comfortable enough to join me for lunch, he asked why I was violent and militant. His judgement was due to my chosen hair style (an Afro) and the racial riots of 1967. The Mormon Church doctrine stated no person of color could have a position of authority because we had the Curse of Cain, however we were welcomed as members. This was the same justification given for slavery, and it's not understood why only people of color had the Curse.

With a military leave of absence from IBM, I joined the Navy in 1970 to avoid being drafted. They considered me a political activist because I rebelled against injustice by publishing in the underground newspaper. I was instrumental in getting Senator Sam Ervin to open a congressional investigation regarding substandard mattresses that resulted in my captain losing his ship.

I married my smart, beautiful wife, Tawana, in 1978. We tried to expose our son Bruce to spirituality and Christian values. Our daughter Tamia attended the UUC's Open Door School. We came here several times for memorial services as well as meetings in Freeman Hall for Charlotteans for a Free South Africa.

My brother-in-law was a Krishna devotee who introduced me to the Hindu community. We both questioned the strife between Hindu, Muslim,



photograph courtesy of Manny Allen

Christian, Jew, atheist and Buddhist when it was obvious to us there is value in all. We have finally found a congregation that shares those values.

Now at 71, Tawana and I have been UU members about two years. We are attracted to the UUC for its stance on social justice and environmental issues. We have built a trust with this congregation, and are grateful to have held the memorial service for our son here. We have come to know

you better through the “Undoing Racism” workshop, and the transparency and openness displayed here, as well as the welcoming of our family during our family reunion. We are thankful for all blessings.

TRUSTING A NEW CHURCH COMMUNITY

by Vivian Brenner



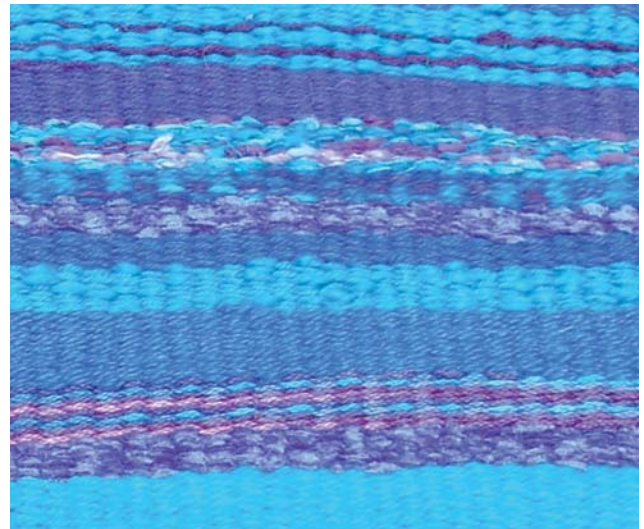
I was raised by a scientist and a mother who read voraciously. Both of my parents were skeptics, so they taught me to question, challenge and debate, and to use the scientific method to look for truth. Both had strong ethics and an insistence on doing the right thing, for no reason other than it was the right thing to do.

We lived in Durham County in the late 1950s until 1964, and there were two Jews in the school (my sister and I). In fifth grade, kids would walk behind me and touch my head. When I finally asked why they did that, one kid said they were looking for the places where I shaved off my horns. I was shocked and frightened, and told my mother, who did her best to reassure me. Another kid used to follow me in the halls, whispering epithets about Jews, so no one else would hear him. I can still see that kid's face, 60 years later.

We lived in Washington, DC, in the mid and late 1960s, and it was the time of assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate and the Pentagon Papers. I was an idealistic youth, and marched, sang and worked for civil rights and an end to the debacle in Vietnam. The lies that perpetuated the war and the murders of our dedicated leaders were blows to me, and to many others. We were tear gassed, beaten and angry.

In college at age 24, I took an Intro to Philosophy course, which introduced me to thinking in a different way. My fellow students groaned and fought and didn't grasp much of what they were reading. For me it was as if all the lights were turned on! Aristotle, Sartre, Descartes, Hegel, Plato and Spinoza became my mentors. It was the start of me opening my mind to other ways of perceiving.

Following college, I went into the Peace Corps and lived in a remote village in St. Lucia, in the Caribbean. I learned what it is like to carry water up a hill in buckets when the community water pumps broke. Hot baths and showers were for the wealthy. I worked with local potters, basket makers and wood carvers in a handcraft center and was the only white person for miles around, which had its own valuable lessons.



needlework by Vivian Brenner

Years later, after moving to Charlotte and building a life with Dick Kistler, we were looking for someone to perform our marriage ceremony. After hearing Jay speak and volunteering for a few projects, we decided we loved this community, particularly for its focus on social justice and the kindness of its members. Here at the UUCC, I have been encouraged to grow, to gain a better understanding of what spirituality is, to work diligently for equal rights for all of us, and to share my bounty with others. For a person who grew up with cynicism and mistrust, this place has gentled my spirit and given me direction.

ADAPTING AND THRIVING IN TIMES OF CHANGE: A LIBRARIAN’S PERSPECTIVE

by Thomas Cole



In January 2010 in response to the fast-growing economic crisis, my employer, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, opened a “Job Help Center.” I was shifted from my usual role in the History and Genealogy Room to the new Center where I formed part of the crew of a half-dozen employees specifically

deployed to assist job-seekers. I spent a year there adjusting my skills to their needs.

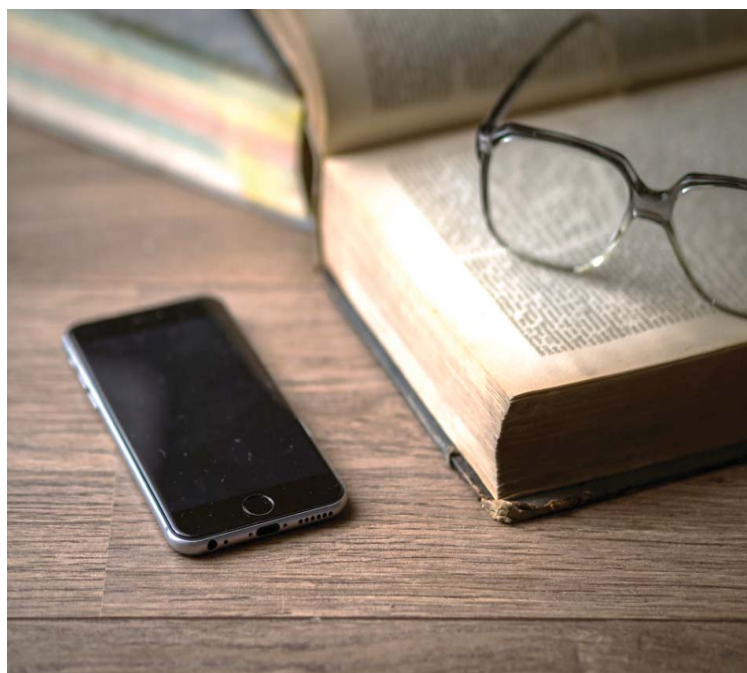
I saw people confronting barriers to employment like having a criminal record or lacking good literacy and math skills. These are things I could have anticipated, although they hit me in a different way when it was my job not just to understand them in an academic way, but to help the person in front of me overcome them.

My experience in the Job Help Center also gave me a new perspective on technological change. Almost all of my public service involved looking over people’s shoulders and sometimes taking over the mouse or even the keyboard as they worked at the public computers. I found that the internet, far from leveling the playing field, reinforced the exclusion of the most disadvantaged from job opportunities. On public computers, the browser can’t remember your password, but every employer requires you to set up an account, and locks you out if you guess wrong too many times. Multi-page applications would time out if one took too long to answer the questions on one page. The applicant would then lose his or her work, which was the cause of rage or tears more than once in my experience.

“I just want to wash dogs!” one man exclaimed when faced with the length and complexity of the online application required by a pet-care chain.

I could not change the big picture that stacked the deck against these visitors to the Library. Although we had some success stories, I could hardly assure them that filling out applications would lead to a job.. I could, however, give them a moment of human connection. I started copying the practice of one colleague who, when asked to help with some computer problem would say, “Let’s figure this out!” and walk back with the patron to his or her seat. Once alongside the job seeker, I would be privy to details of their life story, which emerged as they filled out a resume. I tried to listen and advise as respectfully as I could and was sometimes rewarded with a handshake or a smile of recognition the next time we saw each other.

Maybe that’s all I can ask of myself as an individual—show respect and remember the common humanity between myself and the person in need. Gosh, is that it? I won’t change anything that way! No, I won’t—not by myself, at least. Part of realizing the limits of what one can do as an individual is realizing that there is more, much more, that I can do, that we can do in partnership with others. I’m glad I belong to a congregation that is plotting such a course for itself.



photograph by Dariusz Sankowski, Pixabay

ADAPTING AND THRIVING IN TIMES OF CHANGE: A LIBRARIAN’S PERSPECTIVE

by Lisa Lackey



I once had this notion that my purpose would somehow find me. I would wake up one day and just know. Adults were always asking me, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I had my pat response ready, “a veterinarian, a writer or artist,” but I didn’t put much stock in any of these. I knew in my secret heart that

something would emerge in my being—or better yet, my brilliance would be discovered as this blinding flash of light, and I’d be mentored along towards my destiny.

When college made me claim a path, I became an English major: four years of reading and writing and diving deep. Upon graduation, I wasn’t any closer to knowing my destiny. I decided to go back to school for my teaching degree—I loved books, liked young people, I’d teach high school English! That was the extent of my thinking, though I was still waiting for that flash of light.

I loved teaching English, but while pregnant with my daughter, my energy flagged. The weight of three hours of papers to read, comment on, and grade was too much with a family at home. My mother-in-law, a veteran teacher, suggested I become a librarian so I decided to go back to school. With a child at home I was deep into the genius of Dr. Seuss and David Shannon, and the idea of sharing books and getting kids excited about reading seemed like a creative, purposeful way to spend my days.

And it has been. Except over the years, the introducing-kids-to-books part has become a fraction of what I do. To remain relevant in the age of digital information, librarians are now called “media specialists.” Principals were given the option of trading their Master’s-Degree-pay media specialists for two assistant positions, and many did. The rest of us took on as many duties as we could to increase our value. Our mantra became: be flexible and do whatever is necessary. Although stressful, it was impossible not to grow and to learn.

Our curriculum is now based around technology. We teach kids how to use their devices and help them learn how to sift through the mass of information out there. Teaching the thinking skills behind those decisions is challenging. More challenging is staying on top of rapid changes in digital technology.



photograph by Julita, Pixabay

So, where am I? In a place of learning every day, and needing to freshly value my strengths. I teach the digital piece because children do need those skills. But what I love more are the opportunities to read stories, to go down rabbit holes about dinosaur extinction with third graders, and to sing with my kindergartners. “You are my sunshine, my only sunshine” is one of the first songs we learn. “I’m picking up a baby bumblebee” is another favorite, especially the part where you pretend to squish them. That’s where my heart is.

ADAPTING AND THRIVING IN TIMES OF CHANGE: A LIBRARIAN’S PERSPECTIVE

by Camilla Mazzotta



I’ve been a public school elementary librarian for going on 18 years now, but it wasn’t my first career. That first chunk of my working life was as a computer programmer up North. After years of coding, I recognized that I was absolutely unfulfilled and needed more from my job. So, I used my family’s ensuing move to Charlotte as a reason to call it quits.

Being a newbie here at that time, I gravitated to volunteering in the media center at my children’s school. This transition was natural as the public library in my hometown was a hangout of choice when I was a kid. This sacred space continued to play a big role in the early lives of my own children. With this pull from the past, volunteering slowly morphed into pursuing a library science degree creating a new career path that fed my interests and my soul.

When I began at Sharon Elementary, a librarian’s curriculum stressed things such as book genres, author studies, reference materials and the like. All those I connected with and so enjoyed sharing with kids. Technology was present then, but not pervasive. One by one, old

technologies bit the dust and were replaced by the capabilities of a computer. Indeed, there was no denying that technology had infused the lion’s share of the media specialists’ most recently rewritten curriculum.

My initial discomfort with this sea change has mostly relaxed now. Looking back, I can pretty much pin this “courageous reimagining” of my career on a single, defining experience. Several years ago, our PTA had purchased a SmartBoard, a type of interactive whiteboard. It sat in the media center, ready to be checked out by teachers, but non did. Surprisingly, that SmartBoard called out to me and I responded. I trusted the educational trend that said this was a beneficial hunk of technology. Little by little we came to terms and I discovered its many benefits. Indeed, it’s now at the core of my teaching and I’d be lost without it.

This is just a single example of how I dealt with my profession’s overhaul. It was either—be open to something new or be out-moded! And importantly, not only do I have to use technology, but I need to grasp it well enough, in order to break it down and teach it to my students. Granted, kids may be digital



Mysticcartdesign, Pixabay

natives, but, we librarians are needed now more than ever to teach kids how to use software and hardware well and how to evaluate the mountains of information and indeed, fake news, they are faced with. Ever changing technologies are just tools to support kids with their information

needs and their pleasure reading, and both of these things have always been at the core of what we do in libraries. In sum, I’m glad to have dug in and can still call myself, “librarian.”

LIVING IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

by Kathleen Carpenter



Ask anyone what they know about South Korea and chances are they picture a modern nation with a thriving economy. Which is true—and it’s why it’s so hard to remember that the country was either occupied or at war for more than half the 20th century.

So, when our family of six, headed up by my Army officer father, arrived in S Korea in 1970, it was to a very different country than it is today.

Upon arrival in Seoul, we were driven three hours to an American army post near the city of Taegu. I can still remember looking out the windows of the car during that drive in stunned silence. Instead of cars, the two-lane road was filled with carts pulled by oxen and ponies—and smoke spewing buses. The rural villages and rice paddies were straight out of a Pearl Buck novel. Raw sewage ran down the side of the roads and when we finally arrived at the Army post gates, small children swarmed the car, begging for money. And everywhere, so many people, none of whom looked remotely like me. Culture shock does not begin to describe it.

And then, one day later, still in a daze, my sister and I were told to head down to the post teen club where we and a few dozen other teenagers caught a train to the city of Pusan, an hour south of Taegu. Once there, we were taken to Hialeah Compound, an American military base and home to our new school, Pusan American High School. We were to live in dorms near the school for the rest of the year, Sunday evenings to Friday afternoons.

I was an introverted, socially immature freshman and those first few weeks were mind-numbingly terrifying on so many levels. I couldn’t tell you which was scarier, the new reality of *where* I was living or the

fact that I was in a dorm with a group of older teens, many with 1960s “hippie attitudes” around sex, drugs and rock-n-roll.

Fortunately, I soon realized most of those cool kids were not nearly as intimidating as they originally appeared. While they might have engaged in a few more nefarious activities than I, we shared a powerful bond simply by living under such unique circumstances, a bond that proved stronger than social standing, age, or the common interests around which teens coalesce in larger high schools.



photograph courtesy of Kathleen Carpenter

Unlike our parents who seemed happy to live completely on post, we teens loved exploring our host country. The shock of poverty soon faded as the excitement of new experiences and lots of freedom to explore beckoned us.

Every weekend, we took off in taxis to downtown Taegu. We did not speak Korean and very few of the Koreans we met spoke English, but we communicated just fine. With rare exceptions, we were treated with kindness or at least a polite tolerance.

There is no doubt that these experiences contributed to my open-minded attitudes around race, culture and economic status. Sometimes the most challenging of situations turn out to be the most life affirming.

LIVING IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

by Marsha Kelly



My entree into the secret and fascinating Mexican culture was an organization called CASA, the Center for the Adolescents of San Miguel de Allende.

As a retired nurse-midwife, and because I started studying Spanish at an

early age, over the years I've been able to get my foot in the door of CASA's school for midwives, teaching some classes and just hanging out with the students and teachers. I have had many adventures with them, and in June I had another beautiful experience. The graduating students who I had spent time with during their six semesters asked me to do a "Blessing of the Hands," a ceremony frequently included in midwifery circles. One of the students with whom I had become especially close thought that having both me and a traditional midwife from the countryside would be a nice blend. The traditional midwife was Dona Casilda, who had also occasionally taught them her secrets. So the student and I took the 45 minute drive to Doña Casilda's home in an outlying community. In this setting, alien yet somehow familiar, as she stirred up chopped cactus and beans seasoned with a zippy salsa prepared by her daughter, and served it to us in freshly made black corn tortillas, we chatted about birth and death and the graduation ceremony. We planned our roles, speaking the universal language of midwifery and of women, and I delighted in her use of "yada, yada, yada" to indicate how we would wing it at times.

Sadly, Doña Casilda did not show up for the graduation the following weekend. The other midwives calmly said, "Oh, probably the rain last night flooded the river and she wasn't able to cross"—

and we went on without her. My "yada yada" portion suddenly grew much bigger! As my part of the ceremony began, it was just the students and me. I gave them roses, red ones representing my wishes for them and white ones representing the wisdom of the traditional midwives who have come before us. I blessed their hands to the service of others, praying that they be consoling, healing, strong and confident. It was so personal as I connected with each of these lovely young women, surrounded by traditional ceremonial copal incense. While I really was just at the periphery of the whole ceremony, and Doña Casilda was absent, it still seemed a perfect blending of women and cultures.



photograph courtesy of Marsha Kelly

There is much we have to learn here, about cultural appropriation, white privilege and history we never knew. I am aware of my great privilege to be able to come and go to San Miguel and, yes, there are governmental, economic, and historical forces that continue to keep parts of Mexico in poverty, corruption and violence. But the way to my own personal transformation is through experiences like the ones I have often in San Miguel. One-on-one. Moments that happen among just a few people. This, I believe, is a way the world will change.

LIVING IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

by Elsa Lafferty



Growing up in Indonesia was magical: the sounds, the smells, the food. I had a big swing, a treehouse and a small pet monkey. Every day I rushed home, changed my school uniform for play clothes, hopped on my bike and went to the boys next door for adventures. We played all kinds of games, made kites to fly in the open

field, used the banana trees for target practice for our knives, or went swimming in the city pool. On Sunday, we went to church with our family, then had dinner at grandmother's house.

We never had Indonesian friends. They went to different schools and lived outside the city, we never saw them. Their parents served in Dutch households as housekeepers, cooks and gardeners. My parents were convinced that Indonesian culture was inferior even though their religion, temples and art was thousands of years older than anything Dutch.

The colonial system was firmly in place, but a big change was coming...

Indonesia had declared independence after the Japanese left in 1945. The struggle continued until 1949, when the Dutch officially conceded. We were forced to move to the Netherlands, our Fatherland, but a land my parents had never seen. They were allowed to take one crate of their belongings and tried to be positive, saying, "It can't be that bad, we are all Dutch and speak the same language."

The Dutch were not overjoyed to see us. We were the first people from the islands, and even though we spoke the same language and wore the same clothes, they had never seen darker skin tones. We were treated as displaced foreigners, not fellow Dutch citizens. There were no apartments for us. We moved five times from a room in an old hotel, to deserted military barracks and finally to a flat of our own.

The move was very difficult for my parents. They both suffered racial discrimination and had difficulty finding work, which was an enormous shock for them after being part of the privileged class in Indonesia. They became depressed and life at home was miserable.

Two things saved me: music and sports. My father played the piano every night and I sang in two choirs. Playing volleyball, I was selected for a team that represented the Netherlands in Belgium and Germany.



photograph courtesy of Elsa Lafferty

School was a bit awkward as I was always the only brown-skinned student. I never was invited to others' houses or parties; I never belonged. Fortunately, studies came easy for me and I was in the top percent of my class and prepared for college. Turned away from one college because of my Indonesian ancestry, I earned my degree in elementary education from St. Agnes Teachers College and was student body president my senior year, thanks to the acceptance and inspiration I received there. By the time I graduated I was ready to take on the world!

One year later, I left the Netherlands for the United States.

STARTING OVER

by Rebekah Visco



Nursing school is ridiculously hard, in ways that are impossible to explain. It doesn't matter what else you've ever studied or how much you know about other subjects, the human body is astoundingly complex and mysterious. Self-doubt is a daily practice as you plod your way through classes, and the odds of survival seem slim. Yet many of

us do survive and find ourselves signing RN after our names. We are lucky to find jobs, and despite everything we learn in school, that's when the real learning begins.

It turns out the most challenging part of nursing is often not related to the physical sciences we have studied. At the heart of nursing are the principles of caring and specifically the idea of caring for the whole person, not just treating illness. Healing is a process involving the mind, body and the spirit.

At the hospital where I work, we base our practice on the work of theorist Dr. Jean Watson. She developed the model of caring science that guides all of our interactions with our patients. This model includes core principles of practicing loving-kindness, being authentically present, developing trusting relationships, creating holistic healing environments, cultivating spiritual practices, intentional caring consciousness in all aspects of even the most basic human care, and being

open to miracles. You know, simple stuff.

After practicing nursing for more than five years, I finally have some confidence in the knowledge and skills I have acquired. I am often a preceptor for new nurses, and I enjoy passing on some of what I have learned. But the truth is that every time I meet a new patient, while I may know something about their medical diagnosis, I have yet to learn their story. Caring for that patient requires me to walk into that room with an open mind and an open heart and the willingness to allow them to teach me who they are and what matters to them. To meet people every day with vastly different experiences and perspectives than my own and be allowed a small role in their journey toward healing—whatever that might look like—is a privilege, and it is humbling.



photograph by Dariusz Sankowski, Pixabay

It's true that I started over in dramatic fashion almost ten years ago, with the unending support of my amazing husband and kids. Of all the blessings I have received along the way, none is more special than the daily opportunity to form real connections with people I have never met. This introvert has come a long way from sitting alone in an office answering endless tech support

calls. But we all start over in small ways all the time, and every time we interact with someone and allow them to fill our cups, we are creating courageous connections and inviting transformation into our lives. May we approach each other and those we meet with empty cups, and may we remember to allow space for miracles.

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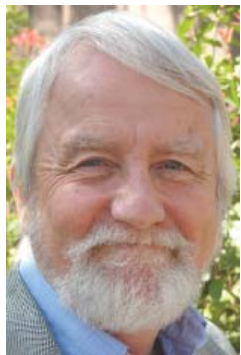


Manny Allen

Emmanuel Allen, has been married to and Tawana Wilson-Allen for 40 years. They have three children and seven grandchildren. Emmanuel retired after 30 years with IBM, 10 years owning a paper and party store, and 12 years with FedEx.

Vivian Brenner

Vivian's Ukrainian grandmother, Zenaida, taught her to crochet when she was six years old, followed by embroidery and basic sewing skills. Over the years, she's learned how to knit, make tatted and bobbin lace, needlework, spin cotton, wool and silk. Her interest in crafts took her to the Peace Corps for two years (1979-1980), working in a handicraft center in rural St. Lucia. Reading textile history and learning how people created their skills is fascinating, and gives an additional richness to her work.



Bob Bushorn

Bob Bushorn has been attending the UUCC since he and his wife Lee moved to Charlotte in 2014. Before moving, they were active with UU congregations in the Cincinnati area. Bob, a universalist, is inspired by wisdom traditions of Buddhism, Japanese Zen, contemplative Christianity, Sufism, Judaism and

humanism. Our Vision challenges him to set doubts aside and join hands to fight for transformation of our species.

Thomas Cole

Thomas Cole joined the UUCC in 1998 and has sung in the choir, taught and learned, and served as Co-Chair on the UUCC Board of Trustees. As a public librarian, he honors others' inherent worth and dignity by respecting their right to ask and know. He and Carol Hartley are the parents of Sarah and Patrick, both of whom graduated from CYRE, OWL, and COA to membership in the church.



Edie Gelber-Beechler

For Edie painting is all about color. Mixing colors, choosing just the right ones, excites her. For instance, if she puts a tiny line of blue somewhere where it just has to be, and it makes that one-inch section perfect, then she's thrilled— even if the rest of the piece doesn't work that well! Painting reinforces her spiritual path when it takes her out of time. All she knows is the moment, the canvas, the paint, the brushstroke. That's all that matters.



THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS:



Marsha Kelly

Marsha Kelly has been a member of UUCC for almost 40 years. Her children and grandchild attended Open Door School and were in the CYRE program for several years. She has served on the Social Justice Team,

coordinated Room in the Inn, served on the Board of Trustees, and now co-facilitates *Writing Your Spiritual Journey* groups. A retired nurse-midwife, she has been able to spend part of the year for the past four years in her home in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

Lisa Lackey

Lisa Marcoff Lackey has loved writing all of her life, from short stories and essays to poetry. She's currently dreaming about the children's book she should be writing. 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.



Elsa Lafferty

As far back as Elsa Lafferty can remember she has felt a longing to capture the beauty around us. Colored pencils, paints, were a constant part of her school years. So were regular trips to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam to study the Dutch Masters. Photography has opened up

endless possibilities. Traveling, stopping whenever



something interesting appears. Elsa says, "How fortunate to be in a place of my life where I have the luxury of truly being in the moment, waiting for the light or an expression, for a flower to open, a wild animal to stop and look at you. A sunset, a moonrise . . . To capture that moment makes my heart sing. To be able to share it with others will only enhance the sweet experience."

Camilla Mazzotta

Camilla has been a UUCC member since 1998. Much of her time here has been enjoyably spent in the CYRE wing teaching elementary grades. Her day job is with CMS as a children's librarian.



Rebekah Visco

Rebekah has been a member of the UUCC since 2010, along with her husband, Evan, and children Samantha and Adam. She has been a member of three UU congregations over the last 28 years. She works as a nurse and enjoys reading, dancing, traveling, music, poetry and all forms of artistic expression.



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