

*Once a month, we invite members of the Winchester Unitarian Society community to share how this congregation has impacted their lives and how they have contributed to our life together.*

*Today's testimonial comes to us through a unique circumstance. Early fall, we received word that a Unitarian Universalist in Pennsylvania, Ebe Emmons, was donating \$10,000 to the Winchester Unitarian Society from the estate of her aunt, Suzanne Reed Newton, in her memory.*

*I had the opportunity to speak with Ms. Emmons and learn more about her aunt. Suzanne spent much of her childhood in this congregation as her father, George Hale Reed, was minister here for two decades.*

*Thus, in our annual service of remembrance, I thought it fitting that "Suzanne" offer her testimonial about the Winchester Unitarian Society. With Ebe Emmons' assistance, here is Suzanne's reflection on her life and the important part the Winchester Unitarian Society played in her early years. Many thanks to Maggie Russell for bringing Suzanne Reed Newton to life:*

It is good to be back in this sanctuary! I have so many memories of this place. Of course, when your father is the minister, one is bound to know a congregation and its building in a special way.

My life began with Sunday worship, the Palm Sunday service. It was March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1920 and just as my father was getting ready to preach the sermon, my mother was rushed to the New Bedford hospital with labor pains. As congregants were making their way to church, she waved happily to them as the car sped past. My birth made the headline of the next day's newspaper: "Palm Sunday Baby Born to Fairhaven Minister."

I was still a baby when Father began his ministry in Winchester. We first moved into a house on Symmes Road and then a larger place on Ridgefield. It was four of us – Father, Mother, my older sister Judy and me, plus our beloved dog Pippa.

I enjoyed a happy childhood. Judy once said that I would "sometimes burst into spontaneous dance steps of joy."

I first developed my love of singing at home. No breakfast was complete unless it included music.

There were so many children to play with, both at church and in our neighborhood. We lived near the Gilberts, the Kennersons, the Welburns and the Lymans. I loved to explore! I soon became known for disappearing; Mother would sometimes tie a rope around my waist and knot the other end to the porch so I couldn't go too far. One time, I didn't come home from kindergarten when expected. Father was beside himself until we received a phone call from Mrs. Ellis, the mother of my classmate, Russell. She said a little girl had come over to play. Is this your daughter?

Judy says this wanderlust inspired my love of travel later in life. But as young girls, we would both plan adventures, sneaking out of the house at night to patrol the neighborhood. But I was the only one brave enough to climb the down spout of our friend's house. It is too bad it broke off the building!

We Reed girls went to Sunday school every week. We still have prizes for good attendance – a bird guide, a butterfly guide, a wild flower guide and our own Bible. There is one teacher I will never forget, Mrs. Collins, who would read us stories that needed ethical solutions. Mother was also active at church; along with playing the role of the minister's wife, she started a theatre group, The Winchester Players.

We would visit Father during the week in his study so he could give us and our neighborhood friends a ride home for lunch. He called his car "the Unitarian bus" and would sing lively songs as he drove.

As children, we didn't follow all the controversies in the Society but I remember my parents talking about "the cross." A church member donated a large brass cross and asked that it be placed on the altar table. Then some people complained it was there so it came down, only to inspire the same number of people to complain it was gone. I do not see the cross on your altar table now. I hope, though, that this is still a place of "diverse religious values."

The time comes when everyone must leave childhood and make their way in the world. When it was my time, I left the warmth of our home in Winchester for college at Smith. Not long after, Father stepped down as minister after twenty years of service.

This was a time of change for the whole country because of the War. After college, I joined the WAVES, the women's branch of the Naval Reserve to work in cryptology. I remember waiting for my orders, living in Washington DC as a young woman and working as a waitress. Just my luck; my restaurant was the breakfast spot for many senators. Each wanted their eggs boiled for different lengths of time. Once, when Judy was training to be a recreation leader at nearby Walter Reed Hospital, she organized a turtle race to entertain the patients. When she brought the turtles to my apartment, my roommates were afraid they were moving in!

After the war, I took a position at the National Education Association in Washington. I eventually left that job to explore Europe and then returned to Boston. The world called to me; it was such a joy to meet so many different people and experience many places. But I could not deny another voice, the call to return home.

When I came back to Boston, I worked as an assistant to the director of the Museum of Science. Outside of work, I loved being an aunt to Judy's children. They, too, had fun at the Museum, especially meeting "Spooky the Owl," a live bird that was one of the exhibits. After I left the Museum and took a position at The Horn Book, a children's book publisher; the girls told me Horn Book provided the best presents.

But they were not my only family. Sometimes love comes late in life as it did for me. I met George Newton, an MIT professor, who became my husband in 1968. We married on Judy's front lawn. As George had children from a previous marriage, David, Lisa, and Ralph, I went from being single to becoming both wife and stepmother. What a promotion! One of the great highlights of my time with George was the summer we traveled to Scotland to help scientists search for the Loch Ness Monster.

I was looking forward to a lifetime of adventure with George but it was not to be. He died only thirteen years after we wed. I missed him every day after his death.

I was still fairly young when I began losing my hearing. This motivated me to learn a new language, ASL, and to volunteer at local Deaf organizations. Through these connections, I made friendships that lasted until my final days.

When I was not with the Deaf community, I was involved in many other community activities – singing with the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, being a docent at Orchard House in Concord. I spent many hours reading and researching New England history and genealogy. My friends patiently listened to accounts about King Philip's War or details about the occasional long-lost relation. And sometimes I tried my own hand at poetry. The arts brought so much to my life.

As I grew older, I knew it was time to stop living alone. For almost twenty years, Carleton-Willard became my home. It was not only the place where I resided but the center of my friendships, with residents and staff alike. In particular, I am grateful for the companionship I found with fellow resident and old-time Unitarian Dan Cheever. As I so missed George and he missed his May, our friendship brought both of us joy.

In time, I had to say goodbye to Dan too. And then, as it often does when we grow older, I began losing my memory. When one lives almost a hundred years, there are many memories to hold onto! But I still found joy in life, if only through a cup of ice cream or the sight of the songbirds at my window.

I entered the world in the spring and it was the first day of spring when I left, not long before my 98th birthday. Like all of us, I left behind a legacy. My loved ones remember my "sweetness, grace, and joy in the face of challenge," my "kindness, intellect, and modesty." They remember my "lightness of step and movements, [my] demure smile, [my] generosity and care for...friends and family and so many others." I was so blessed in life and tried to be a blessing to others.

As Judy once said, “There is a ‘sense of place’ that gets inside some people. It is a feeling of belonging and identity.” This place, this Winchester Unitarian Society sanctuary, is such a place for me, the scene of so many memories that served as the foundation for my later years.

I hope whenever you gather here, you remember me and my time amid this glass and stone. I hope whenever you raise your voices in song, you hear me among you. Or I pray you find me in my beloved nature, present in “the most intricate flower” and “the simplicity of the grass, trees and sky.”

My body may be gone but my wish to give, my hope that the future will thrive, lives on.

“Testimony”

November 4, 2018

The Rev. Heather Janules

“You don't have to be perfect to belong in this place. You don't have to have all the answers or always know the right thing to say. You can take chances or you can take safety nets, make miracles or make mistakes...You don't have to have all the answers here or even know who you want to be. Just come right in and rest your heart and stay awhile with me.”

I picked up a card with these words at Hack's, a hole-in-the-wall breakfast place in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where I did my parish internship. Hack's was celebrating their 15th anniversary and every table was adorned with these cards.

One did not come to Hack's for the decor, in the style of “diner meets cafeteria.” Yet it was at Hack's where I fell in love with grits, especially with melting butter. A piece of my Yankee heart died that day but my relationship with hot cereal was changed forever!

It was hard to get a seat at Hack's. This was because of what the owner, Karen, served above all else: a spirit of welcome to all who sat at one of her plastic-covered tables.

Members of my internship congregation brought me to Hack's to introduce me to the community-at-large. I would eventually go on my own and run into someone I knew - from church, from my neighborhood, a friend of a friend. Living far from my friends that year, I was hungry for the greeting Karen served day after day. Whenever I went to Hanks, I knew I belonged.

The card from Hack's is now faded and wrinkled from many moves these past 14 years. Pinned to my refrigerator, I read Karen's loving words as I make breakfast or put groceries away.

It is good I still have this card as I cannot visit Hack's again. Distance is not the obstacle; right before I left Bethlehem, Karen became ill with cancer. Members of her earth-centered women's group sent emails throughout the community, letting us know of her disease and the unlikelihood she would survive. They called her by her chosen name, Still Star.

Indeed, it was not long before they wrote again, letting us know that Still Star had died. Some close friends tried to keep Hack's open and her ministry of welcome alive, but the restaurant was next to meet its end. She who convened this very special place was not there to make it so. Those of us who cherished Karen and Hack's mourned in many ways.

I tell you Karen's story because it reminds us how meaningful it is to connect with somebody's words after they have died. Somehow, through these words our loved ones - whether part of our inner circle or just part of our world - are with us again.

But testimony goes in both directions. I have said that, even if Unitarian Universalism survives the decline of religious institutions, when the sun burns out and life on earth is done, this tradition's great gift to the human experience will be the Unitarian Universalist memorial service.

Unitarian Universalist services are special because we spend little time contemplating the afterlife. They are special as we create space for all those impacted by someone's life and death to give voice to the meaning of this one life, to testify about what sacredness was made real through their actions and words.

In my previous ministry, I served as an Associate Minister for Pastoral Care in a large congregation, a role that included officiating many memorials. Having a front row seat to this intimate rite-of-passage time and time again taught me the power of testimony, the healing quality of finding just the right story to summarize the spirit of the deceased.

For example, there is one story that captures the personality of an adventurous man named Hal who lived well into his eighties. When he married his wife, Barbara, they had the most unusual honeymoon:

Their late December wedding night was a snowy one. Barbara and Hal had a reservation to camp at an Appalachian Trail Club cabin and, even though the weather was treacherous, they went through with their plans.

Hal's brother Jim and Jim's girlfriend Margaret drove them to the cabin through blinding snow. Once they arrived, they discovered the cabin was full of Boy Scouts...They learned another cabin was open...ten miles away.

...they all arrived at this other cabin. But it was too dangerous for Jim and Margaret to head back so they stayed the night. Hal recalled that while it is uncommon to double-date on your wedding night, he was pleased that he and his new bride received breakfast in bed...

Once everyone was up, the two couples noticed a mounted park ranger outside. The ranger asked, "Are you Hal Tufty?" When Hal said yes, the ranger replied, "Mother is worried about you." Hal's mother, a well-connected woman, had called the Secretary of the Interior and asked him to check on...her sons.

And one memorial was remarkable for the way the deceased's words illustrated the rich story of his life. Pete was an intelligent, kind and gentle member of the congregation who died after a long decline from a neurological disease. In his healthier years, he was an avid letter writer and story teller. His loved ones cherished his letters, passages that then formed the heart of his eulogy. I love this account of a trip Pete took with his wife, Dorothy:

Dancing in Uzbekistan is a no-touch affair, but allows for lots of wiggling and swaying and shimmying. People around me smiled a lot; Dot told me later that they were amused by the fact that my feet barely moved while the rest of me moved all over. It was a wonderful party. Every woman had a full set of gold teeth.

His eulogy concluded with words from his granddaughter, giving thanks for his letters:

the conclusion of each letter always includes a bit of advice for a successful life. Last year's reminder has stuck with me: Run like the wind and be kind to people who don't expect it.

But sometimes truth-telling in memorials is painful. I recall a story from a colleague who officiated the service for a well-known man in town. A beloved coach, person after person lauded the gifts and contributions of this man, a man who – the minister knew – was different at home, an abusive husband and father.

My colleague watched the color drain from the faces of the widow and her sons amid the celebratory remembrances. He soon realized that he was the only person in the room who could speak to the broader reality of this man's life. After the last person offered their glowing reflection, the minister said, "Yes, he was all these things. And he was an SOB." The minister knew there was healing in speaking to the full truth of this man's character and his life. Such is the power of testimony.

"Just come right in and rest your heart and stay awhile with me." Karen's card greets me each morning I wake and when I return after a long day. When I took her words home so long ago, little did I know that they would become a perpetual memorial to Karen, to Hack's and to the affection so generously abundant in that tiny restaurant. Like all of us, Still Star was here for just a brief time. But, like all of us, her words and the story of her life bears repeating.