

A Publication of the Winchester Unitarian Society

# Mystic Messenger

www.winchesteruu.org 478 Main Street Winchester MA 01890



December 1st, 2022

Volume 8 Issue 2

## December's Theme is *WONDER*



When we explored the work of the Article II Commission in November—the UUA committee leading the process by which we revisit our Principles and Sources—we reaffirmed that Unitarian Universalism is a diverse or pluralistic

faith. Drawing from a number of traditions for inspiration and ethical guidance, we intentionally cast a wide spiritual circle.

I cherish our religious freedom. And, if I am honest, sometimes this "way of the wide circle" can be challenging. Especially in December. For there are at least three traditions with holidays this month: the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, the Pagan celebration of the Solstice, and the Christian holiday of Christmas, including the preceding month of Advent.

I remember a past December meeting with Unitarian Universalist clergy. I appreciated how one colleague summarized this season simply: "This is the time we make the world beautiful for each other."

December's theme is "wonder." For me, I return to a feeling of wonder when I sit by a Christmas tree in the dark, the only light from the tiny white bulbs, shining on ornaments I have hung on tree after tree throughout my life. And there are other sensory hallmarks - the familiar smell of holiday delights, the beauty of voices joining in song, the suddenly stark landscape of fall turning to winter, my breath forming a cloud on cold mornings. December can be stressful for so many but, like grace, we can suddenly find ourselves in moments that move us to pause and pay attention with awe, arrested by the beauty of the world.

Many say that "the holidays" are really for children, for their excitement and pleasure. But isn't their delight contagious? Doesn't their joy bring all of us joy?

However you recognize this holiday season, I hope you can find it within you to "make the world a little more beautiful" for others. And I hope this beauty finds you, unawares, and brings you to a place of wonder. For all of us were once that child, enraptured with the season, as much as we are now the parent or grandparent or aunt or friend, creating delight. This joy we create, this beauty we offer and behold - these are the true gifts of the season.

—Rev. Heather

## WUS Holiday Schedule

### December 4th

- **Greening Party, After Worship (Around Noon)** Linger after social hour to Deck the Halls in greenery and decorate the Mitten Tree. Holiday refreshments will fuel our festive labors and the fun! Decorators of all ages are welcome!

- Religious Education participants will be creating the **Advent Spiral** outside. **Return at 4:30 pm to walk the Spiral and receive a blessing for the season at its center.**

#### December 11th

- **Grieving a Loved One Through the Holidays** After worship; Location TBD. Facilitated by Rev. Heather and the Pastoral Care Associates.

#### December 18th

- **Pageant, Holiday Potluck and Caroling** Come to worship prepared to choose a costume and recreate the Nativity story in community. The Pageant is a favorite for people of all ages.
- After worship, we will share in a meal as part of the **WUSYG Holiday Fundraiser** and sing Christmas carols after dessert.

#### December 21st

- **Solstice Celebration and Caroling Party, 6pm** We gather in Metcalf Hall for a collaborative and interactive recognition of the shortest day of the year. After we jump the flaming wreath outdoors, we will walk through downtown Winchester, serenading the town with Christmas carols. A great evening for people of all ages.

#### December 24th Christmas Eve

- **4 pm** A family-friendly service with stories, carols and singing by candlelight
- **7 pm** A service centered on lessons and carols with singing, beautiful music and celebrating the Silent Night by candlelight.

**December 25th** Christmas Day/Last Day of Hanukkah: "A New Day" (This service is a collaboration by a few UU congregations. It is pre-recorded and will be livestreamed for those who wish to attend at home. There will be a "worship viewing party" at WUS at our usual time of 10:30 am. Rev. Heather plans to attend in her pajamas so you are invited to do the same.) This service includes something for everyone, with the kindling of many lights, a First Reflection, hymns and carols and two short reflections exploring what Christmas and Hanukkah offer us as we approach the new day.

## January's Theme is *"Finding Our Center"*

*Winchester Unitarian Society is a Soul Matters congregation. Soul Matters is an organization that collaborates with UU congregations to explore monthly themes in worship, covenant groups and religious education. The following is*

a reflection in the Soul Matters resource packet for covenant groups, focused on the **January theme, "Finding Our Center"**



Photo: The labyrinth at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church

When we talk of finding our center, it's natural for calm and rest to be the first things that come to mind. Who would expect anything different? After all, the need for calm is everywhere we look. So, so many of us are tired. We're overworked, over-busy, over-committed, overly scared. We are often so weighed down by responsibility and worry that it only takes one drop of something unexpected to tip us over. So, yes, we long for rest.

And yet, helping us find peace and calm is not the only work found on this path of finding our center.

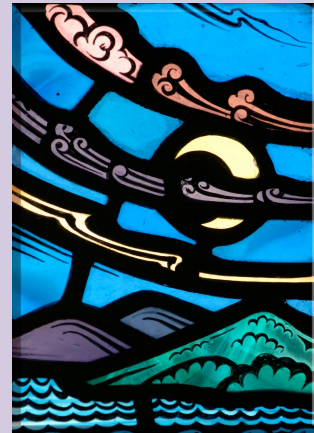
As our faith reminds us, being a "centered person" often involves the opposite of keeping things calm. In order to move toward a balance of justice, we have to upset the current state of things. Oppressive systems need to be challenged and toppled. And to accomplish that, we need to sacrifice calm and comfort, including our own. We need to remember that achieving a balance of equality requires us to be purposefully *off-*

*balance* and *out-of-step* with our culture, or as Martin Luther King Jr. said, we need people who are *maladjusted* to the way things are.

Add all this up and suddenly “our center” appears to be a much richer place than is often recognized.

It’s not simply a place of peace and calm; it’s also a place of being pushed and launched. What you hear in this deep space within is not just the whisper of “Rest” and “Breathe,” but also “Take a deep breath and jump!” We encounter an invitation there, not just relaxation. It’s a still point, yes. But a still point upon which we pivot and turn to something new.

So as we try to make sense of “finding our center,” it’s fine to pull up the image of the Buddha sitting peacefully under a tree, but we can’t let that overshadow the image of a diver balancing way up there on her diving board, pausing to regain her composure and courage so she can leap and go “all in.”



Maybe in the end, instead of only asking each other, “Are you centered these days?” we need to ask, “Where is your center sending you these days?” and “Where is your center calling you to go?”

## February's Theme is **LOVE**

### Lifting Up the Life and Love of **Brenda H. Martino**

By Sam Wilson,  
[Sam.Wilson@winchesteruu.org](mailto:Sam.Wilson@winchesteruu.org)

*On Nov. 2nd, WUSYG lost a member of its family, Brenda Hanson Martino, who had just graduated from WHS last May. Brenda joined us for our service trip to West Virginia last April, where she wrote a quote on the wall, “make my love like a circle, no beginning and no end.” Brenda exuded love in all that she did. The*



*following is an amended version of the eulogy that was given at her funeral service, as a way to both honor Brenda's life, but also as a charge to our community to love fiercely and endlessly as Brenda always did. Here we see Brenda in the red shirt having fun with WUSYGers in front of the church.*

The Quaker author Parker Palmer wrote, "When you die, someone will write your obituary. It will tell readers when and where you were born, where you went to school...some of your achievements and personal qualities...those who survive you and perhaps something about what you meant to them. And yet even the longest, most detailed, and most expansive obituaries always omit the essence of the life: the history of the person's heart."

My hope is that we remember the history of Brenda Martino's heart: who she was, who she became, how she helped make us who we are, and how we can all continue to carry her heart and her love forward.



Brenda was born Brenda Hanson Martino on December 29th, 2003, in nearby Cambridge. Brenda was "all smiles" as a baby. She was the second of two children born to WUS member Ginger Hanson and Andy Martino. She was a younger sister to Fiona. The relationship between Fiona and Brenda demonstrates that two people can have significantly different personalities - and perhaps even get on each other's nerves sometimes - but still form a close and loving relationship.

Even as a young child, Brenda was always generous with her love. She was a daddy's girl who would gravitate toward him with snuggles, albeit often coupled with sarcasm or teasing, that only got more biting as she grew older.

She was also a mommy's girl, who could often be found cuddling mom and doing some of their favorite things together like watching Gilmore Girls, over and over - and over again, or reading Harry Potter out loud. Ginger remembers that when she went to pick Brenda up at the Rec Center as a kid, she would run and jump into her arms and give her the biggest hugs. She would strangle you with her giant hugs. She was a happy kid who could often be found humming along to something with a smile on her face as she went about her day. Her big smile and open heart always allowed her to make friends easily. Brenda was the kind of person who would join you if you were sitting alone at lunch.

This love also extended to non-humans! Brenda was a huge animal lover, who would always stop to pet a cute dog, and deeply loved and doted on all of her pets over the years. Her very favorite animals were snakes, which, knowing Brenda, makes a lot of sense that she would have extra love for creatures that otherwise don't usually receive as much as their fluffy counterparts. Here we see Brenda holding a baby snake that she found while on our service trip to Ferry Beach a few years ago.



When she was 11, Brenda would go on to discover the friend-loves-of-her-life, Colette, Hope, Izzy, and Lucy, who all together call themselves CHILB. Colette, Hope, and Izzy were all also members of WUSYG as well as RE teachers last year. There's some confusion over exactly how and when this group started, but at some point in 5th grade it all really came together, bound by unconditional love, and their ability to completely be themselves and always be totally honest with each other about everything. Their friendship is unique, something very few of us get to experience in our lives; as Lucy describes it, it's like something you read in of a book. Brenda, in particular, was a voice of reason who helped stabilize the group with her consistency and compassion. With her help, CHILB has been uniquely enduring, making it through all the usual trials and tribulations of middle and high school, PLUS during a pandemic, AND with one of them spending a lot of time being treated for mental illness in the hospital.

That friend was Brenda. Her journey included inpatient care and a comprehensive outpatient program. Mental illness was part of her life story but it was not who she was. Brenda loved music - she would meticulously curate monthly playlists on Spotify - and she played the piano and sang in choirs in high school and college. She was also gifted in the visual arts and

her favorite color was red. Brenda was an athlete who made the varsity cross country team her freshman year, and also competed in soccer and basketball. Brenda was a young activist who was passionate about climate change, and also a strong advocate for the LGBTQ+ community. On top of everything, Brenda excelled academically, eventually graduating high school with a greater than 4.0 GPA. And somehow, she still always had time for her family, and CHILB, plus SO many other friends as well. Everywhere she went she would pick up new besties and dole out more love along the way.

Speaking of other besties, I got to know Brenda here in our youth group, WUSYG, which came to be a particularly impactful part of her high school experience. As Brenda herself wrote in her welcoming note to all the newcomers when she was a senior, WUSYG is a place where we don't judge each other, we include each other, we try to get to know each other, and where we can be ourselves. She also wrote, "we can be a family for you if you let us in." That's exactly how I think of Brenda, and I know so many of us do, as a member of our WUSYG family. I also think of her as a mom of the group - as in literally some WUSYGers would call her Mom, but also in how she ceaselessly cared for everyone, including me. I could count on her for anything. She gave SO much to our group, and she was also so grateful for what it gave back, and of course, thoughtful in making sure that she let me know. In her last mailbox note to me, she wrote, "WUSYG has given me confidence that I never thought I would have. I look back at me from freshman year and I barely recognize her. I used to be very anxious and tentative speaking in front of the group, and now look at me. I am by far the loudest in the group." Which I can certainly attest to, oh my goodness, the number of times I was literally two floors above or below her, trying to sleep, thinking, oh my god, Brenda, I love you but you need to shut up. Her volume directly correlated with her comfort, though, as did her level of sass. After hearing the news of her death the memories that kept flooding back to me immediately were all times when she was making fun of me or someone else and had me literally laughing out loud - then bursting into tears - then laughing again hearing Brenda tell me "you're sooo awkward, ohmygod stop" in how I've been grieving her death.

As she acknowledged in that same note, she and I grew particularly close during the week that our group went to West Virginia, where I know she also grew incredibly close to everyone else in the group. This trip also solidified what she wanted to study so that she could help as many people as possible. At the end of the trip, we were given the opportunity to paint quotes on the wall of the center where we were staying. Unsurprisingly, Brenda wrote "make my love like a circle, no beginning and no end."

West Virginia was one of the best weeks of Brenda's senior year, but the year as a whole was a really good one, too. She had a strong support system



and many tools to address the symptoms of her illness. Her future looked bright. Brenda chose an ambitious four-year undergraduate master's program at Simmons College through which she would graduate with a social work degree. In recognition of her aptitude and her promise, Brenda received a Presidential Scholarship. She also had a blast and stunned everyone - and, according to herself - looked the prettiest she will ever look - at her senior prom. I told her she couldn't tell anyone else - but her dress was by far my favorite! As Hope wrote on an insta pic of her from that night, "prettiest woman alive," and Colette confirmed: "Miss princess."

But, as we know from one of her favorite movies, the Princess Diaries, "no one can quit being who they really are, not even a princess." Brenda had so much love to give, and she was loved deeply by so many friends and family members. But sometimes all the love in the world and well-honed tools are not enough. On November 2nd, Brenda was compelled to end her pain.

It is important for us as part of our community's healing to name that Brenda died by suicide. I want to be clear that Brenda did something that we hope no one else in our community will ever do. And yet, we understand how she felt compelled to. Brenda had fought for herself for so long; she was open about her struggles, she sought out help, and she had worked, so, so hard. Despite the depths of her despair, she never stopped giving out her love to everyone, and in turn she was always surrounded by it. Yet we know that she had hurt too much, for too long and on that night she lost her hold on hope. She succumbed to her terminal illness.

Although we must live on without her, we know too that she will always be with us, in our hearts, and in our minds with the plethora of memories she gave us. I know I will never stop hearing some of her sarcastic comebacks and her big, loud laughter that could just swallow you up whole with pure joy. I will never stop feeling her love. She has changed us all forever, and we are all better for having known her and getting to bask in her exuberant light and boundless love. For this, may we all be grateful.

In closing, Brenda was an artist in the literal sense but also in how her life was a work of art that brought so much beauty into the world: she painted bright strokes of joy everywhere that she went. Everyone you talk to about her mentions how she lit up a room as soon as she entered it. She skillfully sculpted positive relationships with every person she interacted with, and masterfully worked to keep them intact. She endeavored to create a world with less fear. Less suffering. And more justice. More laughter. More love.

Now, I ask each of us in the WUS community, what are we going to do about her unfinished masterpiece? How will we love like Brenda; how will we make our love like a circle, no beginning and no end?



---

## Music in Our Future

---

**Jazz in the Sanctuary** returns on **Friday, January 27th, at 8 pm**. As the pandemic wanes, we are really excited to bring back a horn section for this concert. Much as we have enjoyed the piano trios of the last two years, there is nothing quite like the thrill of multiple horns, playing sweet harmonies on tunes and trading solos. If you've never been, this is a really great jazz show with an emphasis on improvisation. We invite some of the area's finest jazz musicians and let them play. The house is always full, the energy high, and the music is fabulous.

We are very excited to bring back **Kemp Harris on Friday, March 31st, at 8 pm**. Kemp is an inspiring performer, a singer and songwriter—a master weaver of American musical styles. He has been a mainstay of the Boston music scene for some time; he honed his intimate style in Cambridge's coffeehouses. He has also collaborated with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Wang Theater and Berklee College of Music. Kemp Harris defies categorization.





Winchester Unitarian Society

**478 Main Street, Winchester MA 01890**  
**781-729-0949 [Office@winchesteruu.org](mailto:Office@winchesteruu.org) [www.winchesteruu.org](http://www.winchesteruu.org)**

Winchester Unitarian Society | 478 Main Street, Winchester, MA 01890

[Unsubscribe {recipient's email}](#).

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by office@winchesteruu.org powered by



Try email marketing for free today!