

A Publication of the Winchester Unitarian Society

Mystic Messenger

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WUS is a Soul Matters congregation, part of a consortium of communities focused on the same monthly themes and sharing resources related to these themes.

March's Theme is Transformation
April's Theme is Interdependence
May's Theme is Pluralism

Interdependence



An Interview with Jo Morgan

By Rev. Heather Janules, Parish Minister and Donna Reed

The theme for April is Interdependence. As we recognize the importance of interdependence every month, we thought this would be a perfect time to launch a regular feature in *The Mystic Messenger* – an interview with a member of the WUS community. Our connections with each other are the bedrock of our strength. And this begins by getting to know one another!

This month, we met with long-time member Jo Morgan. Here is a little of what she shared...

Jo was born in the early 1930's in Edgewood, Pennsylvania, a town close to Pittsburgh, where her father worked. Like many of her generation,

she remembers having to go home for lunch from school. She only had an hour to walk home, eat, and walk back to school. She remembers sometimes being greeted by the Principal if she was a bit late getting back.



Jo's family included a brother, Bob, and – after her father's death and her mother's second marriage – two stepbrothers, Bob and Tom. Jo was the oldest of all the children. Having a stepfather was a big adjustment. Jo's stepfather was a local judge. In her words, "He knew he was a judge."

Jo's paternal grandfather, whom she never met, had been a minister. Her family attended a Methodist church, simply because it was close to their home. Jo recalls visiting her friends' Catholic churches and needing to sit up in the balcony; she thinks because she was not a Catholic. The experience was alienating and confusing. However, when Jo was high school age, she began to realize that she thought differently from those around her about religion. In retrospect, Jo says, "I think I was born a Unitarian Universalist."

Jo eventually married Charlie and they raised three children together; Chris, Tim and Anne. Jo's vocation was serving as a long-time hospice volunteer. While the work was unpaid, she loved the work and appreciated the support of her supervisor, who was a very hard working and a very loving person. Charlie participated by joining the hospice choir.



Charlie and Jo moved to Winchester so their children would get an excellent education. After "church shopping" they decided to attend WUS. Charlie loved singing in the WUS choir and did so for many years. Jo has fond memories of teaching Religious Education with other long-time members like Barbara Keyes. She remembers Gordy McIntosh bringing her coffee on Sunday mornings. She also remembers that Gordy was "the person who knew where all the light switches were."

Jo with the Pastoral Care Associates during the co-ministry of the Revs. Cricket Potter and Tricia Brennan. This photo hangs on her wall as a reminder of her time in this lay ministry group.



Drawing on her experience in hospice, Jo became a Pastoral Care Associate and enjoyed working with ministers Mary Harrington, Stephanie Nichols and David Boyer, John and Sarah Gibbs-Millspaugh, and Tricia Brennan and Cricket Potter. Her friendships with her fellow PCAs became significant. Many helped her move from her previous assisted living community to where she currently lives. As she observes, “Without that group, I wouldn’t be able to do anything.”

Jo is also grateful for other relationships in her life – Donna Reed, Jeff (her financial advisor), Nancy Clancy and Kim Foley, all of whom still see Jo regularly.

Beyond her friendships, Jo’s spirit is strengthened by strong connections with her family and by listening to beautiful music. Her family attended the “Christmas Revels” at Sanders Theater every year for decades and her sons and some grandchildren still go most years.

Jo just passed her three-year anniversary of living at Benchmark Senior Living in Woburn. She acknowledges that some physical challenges get in the way of her doing things she wants to do but, in her words, “I do as much as I can.” Sadly, it is rare that Jo can come to the WUS building.

Jo regularly goes to exercise class and participates in group activities, such as a program called “You Be the Judge” where people respond to current events and weigh in on what should be the end result. When asked if she had any final thoughts, Jo said “I always find it important to stand up for things I believe in.”



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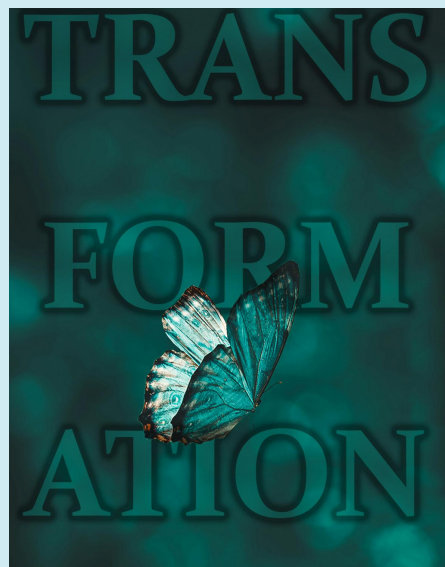
Transformation

From Soul Matters

Let mystery have its place in you; do not be always turning up your whole soil with the plowshare of self-examination, but leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the winds may bring, and reserve a nook of shadow for the passing bird; keep a place in your heart for the unexpected guests, an altar for an unknown God.
-Henri-Frederic Ariel

Make a bit of room. Leave a little space. That may not sound like anything radical or revolutionary. But it turns out that it is one of life's favorite ways to make us into something new.

Be cautious with cultural messages about striving and perfecting, struggle and control. Much of the time, transformation is a much subtler art. It's about stillness, listening and waiting to be led, not fighting with yourself and others to make sure you are in the lead...



In short, when it comes to transformation, the spiritual message is “Be careful with what you’ve been taught about transformation because much of it takes us in the wrong direction.” Our challenge as communities of transformation is to remind each other to take those different approaches. Such as:
Breathing rather than becoming better.
Patience not perfection.
Depth not dominance.
Attention not improvement.

That part about attention instead of improvement is especially important. It's so easy to get transformation mixed up with fixing. And

fixing is transformation’s biggest foe. Trying to purify or perfect ourselves is the surest way to stay stuck. The pursuit of purity and perfection focuses us on our inadequacy, causing us to overlook those unexpected guests Henri-Frederic speaks of.

We don’t want to miss those unexpected guests! Those seeds brought by the wind and passing birds are the partners that make transformation possible. They help us notice new paths. They invite us to take a new step. They awaken new songs within. They remind us that transformation is not something we do alone. They assure us that transformation doesn’t have to be a long and lonely struggle, but instead can be more like learning a dance with a new friend. All we have to do is trust, take the hand of that “unknown God” and follow its lead. So leave some room on that dance floor of yours. Keep your eyes peeled. See attention and attending as your greatest assets and tools. And when that unexpected guest reaches out its hand, don’t be afraid to reach back.



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Pluralism

by Rev. Heather Janules

Like many people, I love to travel. Just leaving home for a weekend brings a sense of renewal and, upon return, helps me appreciate the place I call home.



I believe some of this renewal - if you travel far enough - is simply being exposed to different ways to be human. When I am in Hinsdale, I am

regularly fascinated by how different this small, rural New Hampshire community seems in comparison to its neighbor across the Connecticut River, Brattleboro, Vermont, a town that late night host Stephen Colbert might describe as "West Hemp Ponchotown." There are certainly more pickup trucks in Hinsdale than ponchos. And both places are great places to be! ...



Besides a few car trips across the Canadian border, my first international trip was when I was in my thirties, making a pilgrimage to Transylvania with members of the Cedar Lane UU Congregation. Our inbound flight landed in Berlin in the middle of the night for a layover. It was exciting, being around the bustling travelers, the sound of many languages I didn't understand around me.

This was the beginning of a ten-day period of being in environments where the lessons I learned about how the world works became less relevant. Once our delegation connected with our Partner Church, it soon became clear how different Unitarianism - not Unitarian Universalism - is practiced there. One example: in the sanctuary of that church, there is a large structure hanging from that church ceiling that appears to be made of dried straw. When I asked, I learned that it was part of their Thanksgiving celebration, which they hold in September. We here at WUS celebrate Thanksgiving in November. There are no structures made of straw hanging from the ceiling (but there is ample consumption of pie).

That first trip to Europe clarified for me the almost countless differences between people. Someone once observed to me that cultural differences are often framed as "flags and food and fun!" when in actuality differences are much less obvious. I



remember visiting the restroom of the minister's home in Transylvania, a large bathroom that also included their laundry machine. The machine had buttons that didn't make a lot of sense, and it took awhile for me to figure out that what seemed to be an ace bandage by the toilet was really a roll of toilet paper. There are likely endless ways to construct a machine to wash clothes and different people make different engineering choices.

Our theme for May is "Pluralism," also one of the proposed values for a revised Article II of the Unitarian Universalist Association (what we usually refer to as the Seven or Eight Principles). The proposed text to accompany this value is "We celebrate that we are all sacred beings diverse in culture, experience, and theology. We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with love, curiosity, and respect." To me, this value recognizes the profound differences between people and encourages us to see these differences as valuable opportunities to learn and grow, whether it is considering life's biggest questions or the best way to get clothes clean. (This is sometimes easier said than done so it is helpful to have reminders of the beauty of diversity, such as the banners of different religious traditions hanging in the WUS Symmes Room.)

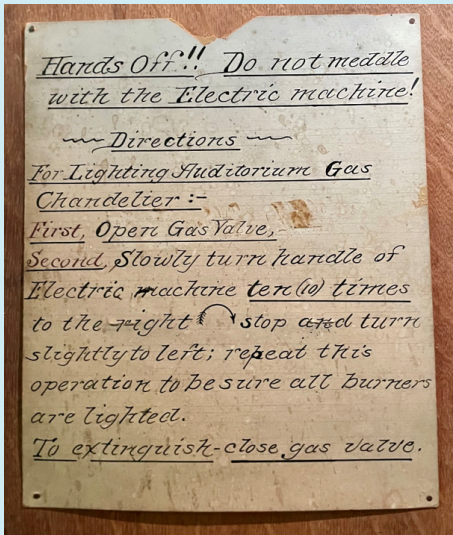
I believe living into the potential of pluralism takes practice. Not everyone can travel so embracing pluralism might be something we do closer to home. If you are stopped at a red light and the car next to you is playing music you don't recognize, could you ask them who the artist is? Could you ask them to turn up the volume? What if you spent a year reading books by authors from a culture with which you are unfamiliar? Some of us can learn about different cultures by respectfully asking questions of those who are older than us. Or younger. New wisdom is available to the curious!

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Look What I Found!

by James Pidacks

At one time, a hand-wound "electric machine" was used to create a spark and ignite the gas lighting. Think of it as a predecessor of the button on your gas grill. Today's electric power was an after-the-fact add-on to the original building. It is a factor in why we see surface-



mounted receptacles and fuse boxes. The aging infrastructure limits our ability to make some changes and expansion of our overall power consumption. Below is a photo of gas pipes still in the walls. I am sure the gas was shut off many years ago. Still, I am going to keep my hands off.

Have you ever wondered why finding an outlet in our church is sometimes challenging? Well, here is a story to help explain it. One day, I was searching for a way to reset a circuit breaker. I found a well-crafted wooden panel with two doors behind the welcoming table in the Symmes Room. You know, the room with the coffee after service. Inside were the circuit breakers I was looking for, and on the back of the left-hand panel, I found these instructions—no date or name of the author, with way better penmanship than mine.



WUS Concert Series Our Last Concert of the Year!

Please join us on **Friday, March 22nd, at 8 pm** for an evening of bluegrass with Tony Watt and band. Award-winning guitarist and mandolinist Tony Watt brings his inimitable bluegrass style to our concert series. Get ready for an unforgettable night of upbeat, toe-tapping music that you won't want to miss!



The next issue of *The Mystic Messenger* will be published in June. If you have a photo, column or submission for this edition, please send it to office@winchesteruu.org by May 15th.

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