

# Simple Gifts

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## *The All Souls Journal*

## Transformation

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister



The concept of personal transformation has become, for some, a trendy phenomenon that can seem more about exotic gurus, designer yoga mats and organic fruit smoothies than about living a soulful life of integrity and courage. Sometimes the purpose becomes hidden by or confused with the pomp and paraphernalia. A wise person wrote:

“...change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not. Change does not take place through a coercive attempt by the individual or by another person to change him, but it does take place if one takes the time and effort to be what he is—to be fully invested in his current positions.”

In other words, “the paradox of transformation” is that it is about becoming more fully who we are, rather than becoming something different. That does not mean that an addict remains an addict or an abuser continues to abuse or a liar becomes a better

liar or a hater becomes more hateful. It means that we discover a deeper truth about ourselves and we find a way to live into that truth. It is helpful to begin a transformational journey by seeking our true core and essence.

***At All Souls there are two primary statements that have defined our church for many decades.***

One is the statement that is printed on our order of service each week (since 1952) and which is also our statement of purpose in our church by-laws. It is:

“This church is dedicated to religion but not to creed. Neither upon itself nor upon its members does it impose a test of doctrinal formulas. It regards love of God and humankind and the perfecting of our spiritual nature as the unchanging substance of religion and the essential gospel of Jesus. Consecrating itself to these principles, it aims at cultivating reverence for truth, moral char



acter, and insight, helpfulness to humanity, and the spirit of communion with the infinite. It welcomes to its worship and fellowship all who are in sympathy with a religion thus simple and free.”

Besides being printed in our Sunday order of service each week for more than 50 years, we occasionally read it during new member ceremonies and at other times in sermons and in describing our church. I am sometimes asked how a church can be united without a commonly accepted creed. I explain that we are bound together not by a common belief (or creed), but by a covenant which is a sacred promise of how we will be with and act toward one another. Our covenant allows us to be one community with a diversity of theologies and beliefs. So, as the statement says, “neither upon itself nor upon its members does it impose a test of doctrinal formulas.” Which means, nobody here is going to ask another to subscribe to a particular belief or dogma in order to belong. Instead, membership at All Souls requires a person to subscribe to a way of being in community articulated in our covenant:

Love is the Spirit of this Church  
And service is its law.  
This is our Great Covenant:  
To dwell together in peace.  
To seek the truth in love.  
And to help one another.

And thus, in committing to live by this covenant, we “welcome to our worship and fellowship all who are in sympathy with a religion thus simple and free.”

The profound principles at the core of All Souls are a wonderful example of “the paradox of transformation.” As we live out who we claim to be in our covenant and in our statement of purpose, we find that by welcoming all who can abide by our covenant “with no test of doctrinal formulas,” we find our church and ourselves transformed.

In our personal lives as well as our church, let us never allow our core purpose and principles to become hidden by, or confused with, the external trappings and surface structures of our community and culture.

*Like the caterpillar that turns into a butterfly, when we come to the messy, challenging parts of becoming who we are meant to be, let us have the courage to hang on long enough to realize our full potential.*



**O**ur church program-year (September-May) is fashioned around nine theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church’s offerings each month are by no means limited to the themes. However, these topics provide an axis around which many elements of church life gain more meaning and depth. They provide us with a set of common stories and ideas that become elements of an ongoing community conversation. Be warned: Seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September - Faith  
October - Death  
November - Forgiveness  
December - Hope  
January - Justice  
February - Love  
March - Brokenness  
April - Transformation  
May - Transcendence

# What Katy Did: Transformation Story for All Ages

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister



Once there was a tiny bug named Katy.

Katy had been living safely on a leaf with her hundreds of brothers and sisters, when a sound called to them from the distance. She and her hundreds of brothers and sisters instinctively formed a line and crawled out from the leafy shade, greeted by the Oklahoma August sun. What sounded like noise before, became an amazing song. Katy listened closer to the rhythm of the song. It sounded like it was coming from everywhere all at once.

*One... One... One... One...* it seemed to be saying. Katy was mesmerized. She could feel the song from inside her thorax, down her abdomen, and up into her head.

*One... One... One... One...*

Katy just had to climb a tree to see if she could figure out where the song was coming from. All of her hundreds of sisters and brothers were already moving ahead to climb the trees, too. So Katy picked a tall tree on the east side of the woods and climbed higher and higher, until she could see the whole forest.

Katy could see thousands of her aunts and uncles. They were all around her, each making their own song. Together their songs created that beautiful sound that Katy was hearing and feeling. Katy wondered why she didn't have her own song to sing. She had always been quiet like her brothers and sisters. The only sound she had ever made was her chomping on the leaves when she forgot to chew with her mouth shut.

Katy was determined. She rubbed her legs together like she had seen the grasshopper do, but noth-

ing happened. She opened her mouth wide, but no sound came out. She spun her antennae in a circle, but that just made her dizzy. All around her, she could hear and feel the song: *one... one... one...* The song was so melodic and so rhythmic it was making her sleepy. Soon she drifted off to a sound sleep.

When Katy awoke everything was different. Katy felt as though she had been stuffed inside a box that was much too small with the lid tightly shut. It felt like she was wearing a coat 10 sizes too small. It was very uncomfortable. She just had to do something about it. The sound of her relatives called to her. It had changed now. She could hear within the chorus the songs of her own brothers and sisters, too.

Lured by those around her, Katy began to push against what was confining her. She pushed with her back and pushed with her head until finally there was a small opening. Katy poked her head through and realized that she was climbing out of her old skin. What she had always known as herself was stuck lifeless to the tree, but she was climbing out. Katy knew somehow that she had done this before. Katy remembered her grandmother saying that she would have to transform many times before she became an adult and finally who she was meant to be. As she pushed and struggled and struggled and pushed, she noticed that her new skin was bright green, the color of grass in the spring.

Katy unfolded her new green wings. She flew off into the sky looking at her old self stuck on the tree below. Katy took in the song all around *her* *One...one...one...* Something was different. The most beautiful sound she had ever heard came from her and drifted up into the woods joining the song. Her voice sounded like a beautiful violin. Katy had found her song.

Katy smiled a big smile and flew off to join her brothers and sisters. They were amazed at what Katy did. †

# More than Meets the Eye

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Minister of Pastoral Care



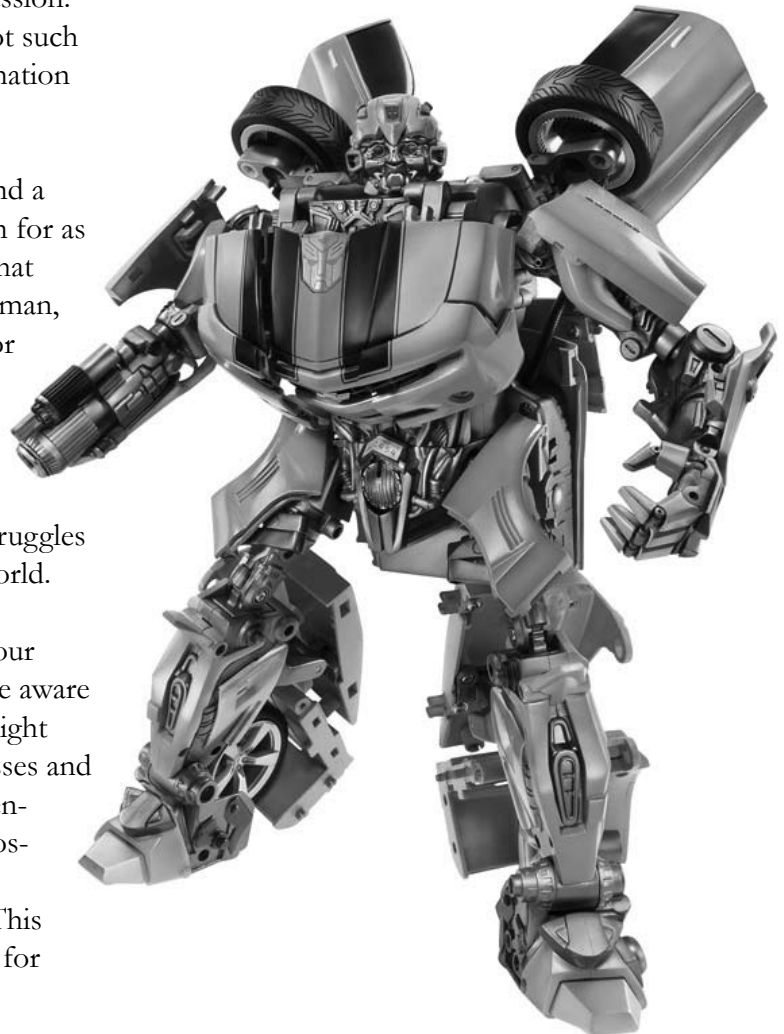
During the month of March our congregation of souls considered what it means to be “broken” – not whole, and not in right relationship with ourselves and each other. This month, we focus upon the experience of transformation. We purposely choose to do this to coincide with the Easter event in the Christian tradition. Many among us look to the life and teachings of Jesus as powerful keys to opening doors to personal and corporate reformation, renewal, and regeneration. It should be a simple thing, really: acknowledge our human nature (as in not God, not in control) and practice looking upon the world through the eyes of love and compassion. However, as we are painfully aware, it is not such a simple thing. There is more to transformation than meets the eye.

There has been an acknowledgement of and a fascination with the idea of transformation for as long as there have been human beings. What are the stories about gods who become human, or humans who become animals or stars, or animals who become people, if not stories of transformation? It is a fearful and a wonderful thing that our human imaginations can dream up mighty metaphors and terrifying tales as containers for our struggles to live in and make sense of our human world.

Right now in this world, as in the days of our ancestors, we are becoming more and more aware of actions that have been hidden in plain sight – actions that make wars and close businesses and change people’s lives. In the face of tremendous upheaval and change not of our choosing it is natural to feel overwhelmed. It is tempting to feel helpless and/or cynical. This is when people turn to history and fantasy for

clues and ideas, for confirmation of faith, for signs of hope, and for escape into alternate realities. Whether we call it intellectualism or dreaming, the human brain and the human spirit collaborate first for survival and then for some vision of happiness. Such a vision often includes a leader: a prophet, a poet, a king (president), a superhero, a Holy One. It is no surprise to me that at this moment in our cultural-political-theological story there is a flowering of movies about superheroes engaged in titanic struggles for humanity’s very survival.

Watching a super man or a wonder woman fight on behalf of truth, justice, and the American way is our personal and corporate story writ large. In viewing these super heroes and monstrous



villains as they paint pictures of deep despair and cosmic calamity, we receive confirmation of the upheaval and chaos and threat that we feel and that we may not wish to acknowledge. In some films there are clear-cut story lines of righteous triumph over the evil, thus transforming the world into a safer, more secure environment in which to seek peace and happiness. Other films dare to fill these huge canvasses with images and stories that reflect complex relationships and challenge the viewer to consider personal responsibility within the larger human community. Transformation starts with personal choice within a universe of possibilities – including other people making their choices. Just as in a movie, our entire human experience depends upon how we frame our world. There is always more than meets the eye, something outside of the frame. That’s why we need each other’s perspectives.

As Unitarian Universalists, we agree to seek the truth in love – to practice being in holy conversation with each other in order to hear different stories and to learn of different experiences and to gain insight through different perspectives. When we are in a community that is in such a covenant we are challenged to engage with beliefs and ideas that we find uncomfortable. Inasmuch as we are able to respectfully stay present in order to grow in understanding and share in each other’s concerns, we are in fact moving toward recognizing the divine spark within each other. It is difficult to perceive anything holy within someone whose story you don’t know from her or his own mouth but who is judged by outward appearance and hearsay or a brief encounter. It is difficult to perceive anything holy in a world filled with violence toward the vulnerable and the innocent. In the words of one of our hymns,

*Love lifts the hopes that force and fear have beaten down.*

*Love breaks the chains and gives us strength to stand our ground. (1)*

Love, Holy One, wholly given and wholly received, transforms: it gives us strength and hope. It was

this transforming love that informed the life and works of Jesus of Nazareth. Love allowed Jesus to understand the extravagance of the woman who anointed his head with costly oil in the midst of great poverty and scarcity (Matthew 26:6-16). Love is extravagant. Love shares because not sharing is not love. Jesus and Gandhi and Mother Teresa and Sojourner Truth and the Peace Pilgrim and Mrs. Westmoreland (my fourth grade teacher) and You Can Name Many Many More, all knew and understood the power and freedom of choosing to live as if there is always enough. Their lives transformed the lives of everyone touched by them directly. Their extravagant love continued to grow and transform through the lives of those people who then transformed the lives of people around them and so on and so on.

So, you see, we all have it within our power to choose to live a life of extravagant love. Really and truly, we are transformers already – for good or for ill. All it takes is paying attention, living each moment as fully present as possible, and recognizing the divinity in each other. It’s as simple and as challenging as that. Now, when you look into the eyes of another person, wherever and however that happens, may you remember that you are a Transformer – and so is the other person. May you continue to practice giving and receiving wholly, holy love. May you discover peace and joy where you least expect it. There’s always more than meets the eye. †

(1) Brian Wren, in “Love Makes a Bridge,” hymn #325 in *Singing the Living Tradition*. Boston: UUA, 1993.



# Spiritual Practices: Transformation toward Wholeness

-by Sarah Gettie Burks, Intern Minister



*“Jack pines...are not the lumber trees [and they] won’t win many beauty contests either. But to me this valiant old tree, solitary on its own rocky point, is as beautiful as a living thing can be...In the calligraphy of its shape against the sky is written strength of character and perseverance, survival of wind, drought, cold, heat, disease...In its silence it speaks of...wholeness...an integrity that comes from being what you are.” ~ Douglas Wood*

Sometimes the greatest transformation possible in our lives is not a transformation into something new and unknown, but going back to that which we have always been. Following last month’s theme of brokenness, I am compelled to focus on transformation toward wholeness and living a life of integrity.

Our internal divisions and brokenness emanate from a place of not being true to who we know ourselves to be. They emanate from being out of touch with our values, ourselves, our true gifts, talents, and callings in life. Although the process toward living an undivided life is a life-long endeavor, let us begin or recommit ourselves to the process this month through the following practices.

## **Explore your role and your soul.**

First, journal about the role you play in the world. If you were to create a mask to demonstrate how you believe you’re seen in the world, what would it look like? What are your outer appearances and how do you create them? List the roles you play in the world. Examples include teacher, father, golfer, professional, sister, or spiritual person. Then, write about who you are at your core. What are you doing when you feel happiest in life? Are you

working in a profession that provides you room to align with your values? Are you speaking up when something isn’t in integrity with what you know to be true? Again, if you were to paint the inside of a mask to symbolically represent who you know yourself to be, what would it look like? When you were a small child, what did you dream of doing? What were your hopes and wishes for your life and the world?

How do your understanding of your role in society and what your soul tells you line up? Are there discrepancies? What would you need to do to bring your life into alignment and to live your life fully and wholly as an integrated human being?

## **Be honest. What’s holding you back?**

Honesty is central to living an undivided life. We experience distancing from others when we aren’t able to be completely honest with them, and distancing from ourselves when we’re unable to be honest with ourselves. Are there times when you haven’t spoken up out of fear of conflict? Or have there been times when you’ve been unable to be honest with yourself for fear of the truth about yourself? Transformation and alignment with what we know to be truth begins only when we are able to be honest with all involved.

## **Spend some quiet time with yourself.**

Find a quiet corner of your home and request that loved ones and housemates respect your need for some solitary time. Sit comfortably, upright in a chair with feet flat on the floor, or cross-legged on a cushion. Begin by observing your breath, watching it flow in and out, but not trying to control it in any way. As you focus on your breath, observe the sensations that move over your body and the



thoughts that pass through your mind. Don't judge them, but observe them as you would clouds passing by a window. Take note of their presence and let them go.

Try sitting for five minutes a day, and increase your sitting time as you are able. Through a regular meditation practice, you will be called to discover and realign with your true self. Stress will subside, and a sense of calm and peace will ground you throughout your day, leading you to a life of greater integrity.

**Check it out in community.**

As individuals, we have great strength and wisdom. As a community, our strength and wisdom multiply exponentially as we support and hold one another accountable through honesty. Often, we are unable to do that which we know we can do until we stand face-to-face before others, held in love, challenge, and support. All Souls provides many venues for personal growth and transformation, from listening to the messages of the ministers in Sunday morning and Wednesday night services, to Branches

groups, and participating in the many classes we offer. Outside the church, you can also build a supportive and transformational circle of your own. Invite some friends who might be interested to join you in an intentional group for self-growth and reflection.

Possible assignments for meetings include sharing personal journaling on a topic decided by the group; verbal reflection on a set of readings; and/or meditation followed by shared reflection. For further ideas on starting such a group or for more details on how to join in activities at the church, please contact me ([sburks@allsoulschurch.org](mailto:sburks@allsoulschurch.org)) or one of the other fabulous ministers here at All Souls.

**Read up**

In preparing this article, I relied heavily on the wisdom of Parker J. Palmer and his insightful book, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life, Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World*. I highly recommend a personal exploration of this work.

Blessings on your journey of transformation toward wholeness and integrity. †

# All Souls: A Transformation Tapestry

-by Laurel Williamson



**Marcia Smith**  
June 1960

*Marcia Smith:* "I knew All Souls was the place for me because it was the first time I ever felt there could be *freedom* in religion."

*Polly Holway:* "I never felt comfortable in any church besides All Souls. I always felt like I should have my fingers crossed behind my back when I recited things in other churches."

*Randy Lewis:* "I wanted a spiritual foundation in harmony with my beliefs that embrace inclusivity."

*Toneille Bent:* "I believe in what All Souls stands for."



**Polly Holway**  
March 1948



**Randy Lewis**  
December 2008



**Toneille Bent**  
February 2009

## What are your spiritual goals?

*Andy Wheeler:* "I look for clarity in transcendental perfect moments."

*Jack Short:* "My spiritual goal is to bring Heaven here to Earth."



**Andy Wheeler**  
November 2008



**Jack Short**  
February 1972

## What are your spiritual practices? What renews your Spirit?

*Rachel Mize:* "I take a few moments of silence and solitude every day to find insight and become centered."

*Sara Carlson:* "I walk outside every single day and look all around me. I always see something new, and appreciate it."



**Rachel Mize**  
August 2008



**Sara Carlson**  
October 1962

## What has been your most significant experience of Transformation?

*Ron Halford:* "Coming to understand an inclusive religious lifestyle and understand the Bible in a metaphysical way."

*Janet Williamson:* "After the diagnosis of a brain tumor in my eldest daughter at age 5, I was forced to accept that I am in control of very little in this life. All my rules and formulas crumbled away and I had to become someone who could surrender."

*Imogene White:* "I was significantly transformed when I learned to live this journey with the God-given word flexibility."

*Dallas Ferguson:* "Becoming a father has been my greatest transformation."

*John Slater:* "Meeting and loving my wife transformed me the most."

*Dorothy Checotah:* "I'm realizing there is so much more to God, this world and myself!"



**John Slater**  
December 1947



**Dorothy Checotah**  
September 2008



**Imogene White**  
September 2008



**Dallas Ferguson**  
October 1979



**Janet Williamson**  
May 1959



**Ron Halford**  
March 2009

*All Souls has always been a place of thinkers, seekers, movers and shakers, and has always been a place where transformation occurs. This particular combination of people and events is unlike any other. The remarkable congregants in these profiles are but a few of the unique and beautiful threads that make up the tapestry of this church.*

# Growing Up is Hard To Do

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director



I overheard a conversation between two middle-aged men at a restaurant the other day. One was consoling the other over the demise of his second marriage.

“They’re the ones who change, man,” the first man lamented. “I’m the same dude I was in high school.”

I so wanted to interrupt and explain the problem.

“See, man, you say that like it’s a good thing. It’s not. Women actually expect a grown man to be, well, a grown man, not the same dude he was in high school. A 16-year-old trapped in a middle-aged body is not attractive.”

For one thing, according to most developmental guidebooks, if you’re the same as you were in high school, you’d still be seeking support for your self-esteem and body image, concentrating on others’ perceptions of you, and seeking social approval. In a word, you’d be looking outside yourself – rather than internally – for validation and self-worth, which comes across as needy and immature and is not sustainable in a healthy relationship.

And that’s why I like working with youth. We actually help them transition from childhood and transform into healthy, mature adults. Apparently, if Freud is right, when our needs are not met at the various developmental stages of our life, our growth is stunted and we remain fixated at that age, despite our chronological years. So what we’re doing in the Youth Department – and as parents – is critical to the success of marriages everywhere.

In the 2009 *Coming of Age Handbook for Congregations*, Sarah Gibb Millspaugh tells how we can help meet the age-appropriate needs of our youth:

- Remember that it’s developmentally appropriate for youth to be self-conscious. What others think of them (or what they think others think of them) is of the utmost importance.
- Provide realistic mirrors that affirm and support

a youth’s many physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. They need to know they’re normal.

- Recognize that challenging authority provides an outlet for new cognitive skills that are critical to maturity, and don’t take it personally.
- Maintain clear expectations so youth can make decisions within established boundaries.
- Provide opportunities for complex thinking and pondering life’s big questions. In *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, James Fowler says we need to realize that an adolescent’s religious hunger is often for a God who knows, accepts, and confirms the self deeply and can serve as an infinite guarantor. If we provide that stability, a youth’s image of God can mature beyond that.
- Give youth the gift of being known and accepted. If I were to boil Youth Advisor Training down to one sentence, it would be, “Ask questions and listen to the answers without judgment.”
- Instead of punitive or directive discipline, use what educator and psychologist Thomas Armstrong calls the respect-listen-collaborate-problem-solve approach. It’s what we in the Youth Department call Youth Empowerment.
- Take care of your own mental, physical, and spiritual health. It’s a marathon; you’ve got to be in shape.
- Have a sense of humor. Meet with other adults in the Family Room and commiserate. We need to be here for our youth and for each other as well.

Know that at this critical phase of a youth’s life bonds with adults make all the difference. We are guides on their faith journey. And, despite what youth say, we are important role models. If we don’t provide consistent, responsible, respectful guidance toward self-discovery at this critical juncture, there is the danger of them becoming permanently dependent upon how others define them. If that happens, in 30 years, our youth may still be the same dudes they are now. †

**Wednesday, April 1**

What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself -Abraham Maslow

**Thursday, April 2**

Man cannot remake himself without suffering, for he is both the marble and the sculptor. -Alexis Carrel

**Friday, April 3**

...and then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. -Anais Nin

**Saturday, April 4**

God gives talent; work transforms talent into genius. -Anna Pavlova

**Sunday, April 5**

An epiphany is a cosmic two-by-four. -Author Unknown

**Monday, April 6**

To transform you've got to want it as bad as a man whose head is being held underwater wants his next breath of air. -Author Unknown

**Tuesday, April 7**

There can be no transformation of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotion. -Carl Jung

**Wednesday, April 8**

Simple kindness to one's self and all that lives is the most powerful transformational force of all. -David R. Hawkins

**Thursday, April 9**

When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. -Dr. Wayne Dyer

**Friday, April 10**

I do not ask to walk smooth paths nor bear an easy load. I pray for strength and fortitude to climb the rock-strewn road. Give me such courage and I can scale the hardest peaks alone, and transform every stumbling block into a stepping stone. -Gale Brook Burket

**Saturday, April 11**

Any transition serious enough to alter your definition of self will require not just small adjustments in your way of living and thinking but a full-on metamorphosis. -Martha Beck

**Sunday, April 12**

Even a thought, even a possibility, can shatter and transform us. -Nietzsche

**Monday, April 13**

I beg your pardon. I didn't recognize you. I've changed a lot. -Oscar Wilde

**Tuesday, April 14**

Transformation comes more from pursuing profound questions than seeking practical answers. -Peter Block

**Wednesday, April 15**

The truth is that there is nothing noble in being superior to somebody else. The only real nobility is in being superior to your former self. -Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Thursday, April 16**

Transformation is not change, but finding the essence of who we are. -Rev. Mary Manin-Morrissey

**Friday, April 17**

This is the heart of transformation, that we die into ourselves, into life. But while the possibility of transformation is always present, like death, there is no...conventional process...to attain

it. Where there are no longer any simple answers, when we must stand in our own light and learn to have a relationship to ourselves, this is when our lives become true service, when our hearts open to embrace what had formerly been outside and separate from us.

-Richard Moss

### **Saturday, April 18**

When communication is cut off, we all suffer. When no one listens to us or understands us, we become like a bomb ready to explode. Restoring communication is an urgent task. Sometimes only ten minutes of deep listening can transform us and bring a smile back to our lips.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

### **Sunday, April 19**

“How does one become a butterfly?” she asked pensively. “You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar.”

-Trina Paulus

### **Monday, April 20**

First comes thought; then organization of that thought into ideas and plans; then transformation of those plans into reality. The beginning, as you will observe, is in your imagination.

-Napoleon Hill

### **Tuesday, April 21**

For the first time in human evolution, the individual life is long enough, and the cultural transformation swift enough, that the individual mind is now a constituent player in the global transformation of human culture.

-William I. Thompson

### **Wednesday, April 22**

History is the transformation of tumultuous conquerors into silent footnotes.

-Paul Eldridge

### **Thursday, April 23**

I never told a victim story about my imprisonment. Instead, I told a transformation story—about how prison changed my outlook, about how I saw that communication, truth, and trust are at the heart of power.

-Fernando Flores

### **Friday, April 24**

In particular what is most important to me is the transformation of a sound by slowing it down, sometimes extremely, so that the inner of sound becomes a conceivable rhythm.

-Karlheinz Stockhausen

### **Saturday, April 25**

In the kind of world we have today, transformation of humanity might well be our only real hope for survival.

-Stanislav Grof

### **Sunday, April 26**

It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation.

-Paulo Freire

### **Monday, April 27**

It is all very well to copy what one sees, but it is far better to draw what one now only sees in one's memory. That is a transformation in which imagination collaborates with memory.

-Edgar Degas

### **Tuesday, April 28**

Personal transformation can and does have global effects. As we go, so goes the world, for the world is us. The revolution that will save the world is ultimately a personal one.

-Marianne Williamson

### **Wednesday, April 29**

The call of death is a call of love. Death can be sweet if we answer it in the affirmative, if we accept it as one of the great eternal forms of life and transformation.

-Hermann Hesse

### **Thursday, April 30**

The message of transformation and how we all can live from our heart, not just from our head, was a very important message for me to learn in my own life.

-Judith Light

# The Transformation of Our Partner Schools

-by Nancy McDonald



In March 1989 All Souls Unitarian Church elected to become active in Partners in Education (PIE) and was the first faith community in Tulsa to engage with a school. Jackson Elementary was selected and for 20 years members of All Souls have supported

teachers, families, and children by serving as tutors, mentors, and role models, by providing material resources, and by developing classroom enrichment activities.

The Children's Advocacy Team, now Partners in Education, quickly recognized that the investment made in the students at Jackson needed to extend to Hamilton Middle School where the children at Jackson would attend next. If our investment in transforming our partner school and the lives of the students was of value, then we needed to assure its continuance by expanding our program to the middle school level. Subsequently, All Souls chose to also expand the involvement at Gilcrease Middle School. The work at Gilcrease began with a counselor, a member of All Souls, who observed firsthand the needs of her students and asked for assistance.

President Ronald Regan's response to the report, *A Nation at Risk*, was to invite corporate America to be a part of the White House Initiatives on Education and to invest in the public schools. It would be a win/win situation. Children would benefit from corporations' involvement and, ultimately, corporate America would have better educated employees. The National School Volunteer Program and the White House Initiative on Education eventually merged to form the National Partners in Education. The goals of the program were to: (1) support the classroom teacher by providing tutors and mentors for individual students, (2) enrich the curriculum by tapping resources in the community, (3) provide role models, and (4) become ambassadors for public education. Tulsa Public Schools was on the ground floor of this merger with the support of the Metropolitan Tulsa Chamber of Commerce (now the Tulsa Metro Chamber).

The neighborhoods, the families, and the children living in the Jackson, Hamilton, and Gilcrease school districts experience many challenges. Crime, gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and increases in unemployment and poverty are evident. Mobility of families, sometimes moving five or six times during the school year, presents special challenges to the children in developing stable friendships and relationships with teachers and peers. Oklahoma HB 1804 presented particular challenges for Hispanic families, and we witnessed an exodus to the surrounding states by the working parent (or both parents) seeking job stability and freedom from fear of harassment or possible deportation if undocumented.

All of these conditions have profound impact on children and learning. Many families lack transportation so children have little opportunity to travel beyond their neighborhoods. Health Care is almost nonexistent for many families. If they are hungry, if they do not have appropriate clothes or shoes, if they are sick, if they lack support for learning from parents, if they struggle with English as a second language, if they are responsible for caring for siblings, if they are left alone for long hours without appropriate supervision, it is difficult for these children to understand and appreciate the value of education and how it could transform their lives.

All Souls members engaged in the partnership program can effect change in the environment and in the level of achievement for students attending Jackson, Hamilton, and Gilcrease. Through PIE your investment can transform the life of a child and yes, your life too. It is difficult to measure or even define the success of this program. The rewards may not be instantly or easily apparent. It may be the smile, the greeting, the thank you, and who knows, it may come years and years later when suddenly a young person recognizes you and says, "I know you, thanks for helping me."

As in the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," and each of us can assume the responsibility of investing in the life of a child. By doing so, each of us, and society as a whole, will benefit. †

# Seeing Words

-by Susan Tillman

A number of poets have chosen to transform their own work by responding to the visual arts. Such an example is Anne Sexton's 1962 poem *The Starry Night*.

Sexton extracts from the painting the location of and reference to an absent community that has grown from the tiny dwellings featured in the painting:

*The town does not exist  
except where one black-haired tree slips...*

For Sexton, the tree, a central image in the painting, facilitates a transmutation. The shift her poem records conserves the original image and extends it in a way that invites the viewer/reader to share in the image she makes:

*...where one black-haired tree slips  
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.*

Arguably, once Sexton persuades us to see in this way, it's difficult to view the tree as distinct from the image itself.

Paradoxically, Sexton writes not only from a temporal distance, but she also forms a new space with her evocation of the image. She participates in the image's transmutation. From van Gogh's the *Starry Night*, the author sees and creates *The Starry Night*. Both painting and poem exist independently, creations of artists each working in a medium somewhat at variance with the other. Paintings primarily require visual space. As many have said, poems require a kind of aural space.

Pretty much everyone agrees that the poem calls into being images that can be seen in the painting, but are not initially of it:

*...The night boils with eleven stars.*

And somehow:

*...Even the moon bulges in its orange irons  
to push children, like a god, from its eye...*

These images convey a sense of what is possible.



## *The Starry Night*

by Anne Sexton

*That does not keep me from having a terrible need of—shall I say the word—religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars. ~Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother*

The town does not exist  
except where one black-haired tree slips  
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.  
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.  
Oh starry starry night! This is how  
I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.  
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons  
to push children, like a god, from its eye.  
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.  
Oh starry starry night! This is how  
I want to die:

into that rushing beast of the night,  
sucked up by that great dragon, to split  
from my life with no flag,  
no belly,  
no cry.

Anne Sexton, "The Starry Night" from *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981). Copyright © 1981 by Linda Gray Sexton and Loring Conant, Jr. Reprinted with the permission of Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc.  
Source: *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton* (1981).

## My Spirit qUUest

-by Virginia Stephens



Last spring I traveled to Jasper, AR, with our youth group. In Jasper there is a ranch called Horseshoe Canyon Ranch. This is a high adventure camp with activities like rock-climbing, spelunking, canoeing, horseback riding, hiking, bouldering, zip lines, rappelling, and swimming. Before this story continues, I should mention that I hate nature. I don't like bugs, natural water, any animal that isn't cute and fuzzy, dirt, goo, dust, reptiles, fish, and, more than anything, heights. When I found out that this was our senior trip destination, I was definitely a little disappointed. Previous seniors have made treks to Boston, and I was in favor of a metropolis versus a canyon with no cell phone reception. Nevertheless, I put on my game face and prepared to make this the best senior trip ever.

All of the activities seemed to come much faster and more intensely than I had feared. However, one particular activity stuck with me all summer and I'm sure it will be with my whole life. It is called the *Via Ferrata* which means "iron road" in Latin. This "road" is actually about 70 feet in the air and is not a road at all. It is, in fact, a series of iron hand- and footholds placed horizontally across a rock face. Traveling this iron road combined several of the aspects of nature that I dread. This includes dirt, goo, dust, bugs, and heights. On this rock face you are suspended by two bungee cords which connect to a harness at the hip but that is it.

On this day, I faced my worst fear. I moved across the rock face between the guide and my youth director and as I went I cursed and sobbed harder than I ever have in my life. I was sure that at any second I was going to fall to my death. I finally reached the end and I could climb up and off of the bluff. Once I was off the rock I put my sunglasses over my eyes and continued to sob and shake uncontrollably. I was so angry at myself for being so afraid. I was angry that my friends didn't seem to understand how important it was to me that I had accomplished such a feat. I was angry with my youth director for choosing this instead of a relaxing city vacation, I was angry with the guide for tricking me into continuing along the rock. But I was so full of pride at the same time. I couldn't believe what I had accomplished. I couldn't believe what I could do even though I was terrified. I was so proud of everyone who completed the course with me, and so in awe of the adults on the trip who knew I could do it despite my fear. After I calmed down and we returned to our cabins the wisest man I've ever met told me something I remember every day. He said, "To do something amazing when you aren't afraid is amazing. But to do something amazing when you are terrified is extraordinary."

I know now that it is OK to be afraid. In fact, that makes it more of an accomplishment. What is important is learning to push through the fear, and to experience everything.

## Spirit qUUest: Not Just for High School

-by Lisa Perrault, Youth Advisor



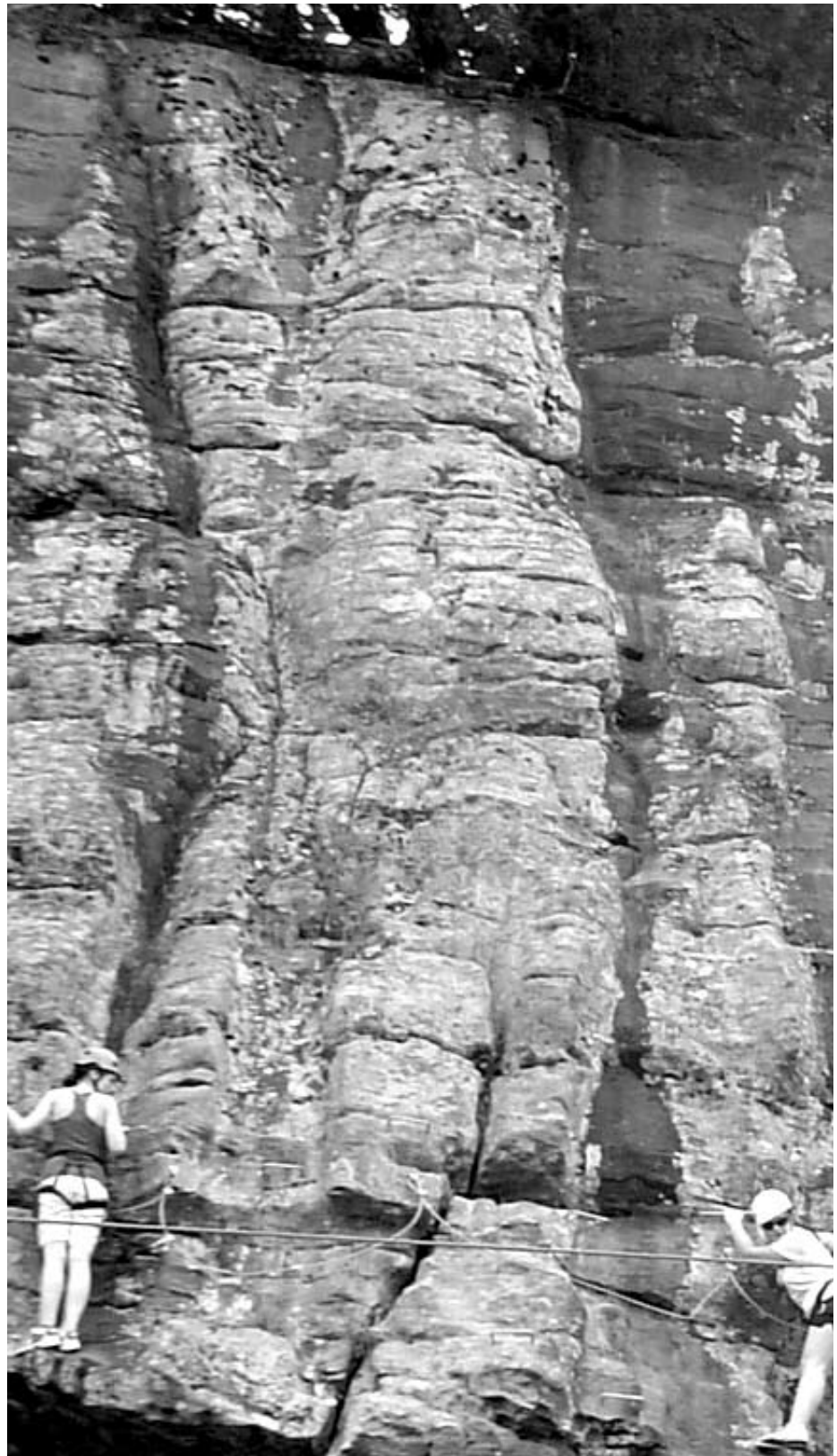
I had the honor and privilege of chaperoning our 2008 seniors on the Spirit qUUest last May. The gentle rolling hills, abundant rocky bluffs, deep cold caves, free roaming horses and goats, and crystal-

turquoise waters of the Buffalo River at Horseshoe Canyon Ranch in Jasper, AR, put us smack dab in the middle of God's sanctuary; the perfect place for a quest for our spirits and the spirits of those who love us.

I was so touched by the growth that occurred on this four-day quest. Our seniors stretched beyond their comfort zones to expand their own repertoire of experiences and to encourage each other to reach new potentials. The bonds among all attending were strengthened. Kate Starr led us through activities that made us think, sometimes entering a world of questions that could be described as “scary.”

This time of sprouting wings and fleeing from the nest can be scary for our young adults as they decide what type of people they are turning into. Their parents, peers, and mentors have given them the tools they need to make wise choices. Will they? Their roots have been planted deeply so that they can always be strong in their integrities. Will they be? We hope for them, we pray for them, and we give them their independence, trusting that they will use the tools they’ve been given and stay rooted in the values that they’ve been taught. It’s a difficult step for our seniors, and their parents.

I was so thankful to get to be a part of this journey on which they had the opportunity to think about difficult questions in the safe company of each other and three adults who love them dearly. I was thankful to get to contemplate some difficult subjects for myself, too. And I was thankful to get to share this wonderful experience with 10 great kids and two marvelous advisors. A quest for spirits... mission accomplished. †



# Concrete Transformation

-by Matthew Scala



So much is shifting within our world. Issues of climate change, energy usage, and the nature of our society of consumption, all offer challenges today. The idea of whether our lives are sustainable is now “in our faces,” as are the questions: How are we treating ourselves and everyone else? and, Will our species evolve to re-experience our oneness?

Answers can be found by being open to learning from sudden, inexplicable changes of direction and these can become part of a transformative process. Any given moment presents both perceived obstacles and opportunities for growth. Concrete reality can become a doorway to other realms.

Recently, while filling out the All Souls membership card, in the space for occupation, I wrote “transformer.” It’s been almost a two-decade-long process to identify and claim this for myself. Now loving the word, transformation, I oftentimes feel tingles of excitement and joy while in the presence of this force. That is, except for those times when I’m resisting my next lesson.

For much of my own life I’d rigidly clung to a limited version of “the way things are” and this wasn’t pretty. The manner in which my family, who struggled with mental and physical disabilities, approached life provided a barren, stunted environment. Values and attributes that many take for granted, like love, self-esteem, compassion, and openness just weren’t found with us. Suffice to say then that I’ve been gifted with multitudes of attitudes, beliefs, and self-concepts that have needed the invigorating power of transformation. Recognizing that this is a major part of my life’s path certainly eases burdens along the way, even coming to see that the alleged burdens really aren’t

burdens at all. They’re just a part of life, providing options about how to transform them. This might be elementary for some, but then again, we’ve each got our own timetable for life’s teachings.

This week I’ve been granted a mouthful to chew on. Joyously arising one morning at four I meditated, wrote, and took my extraordinary husky on a long walk. While peacefully loving the early morning tranquility, I found myself singing. It was then that I experienced a woozy feeling. Moments must have passed before I lifted myself off of the concrete street seeing red everywhere. It took me a few seconds to realize that this was blood and it was pouring out of my face. What a surreal experience. A man that I remembered seeing a way off before I fainted appeared; he offered concern, comfort, and companionship during the several-blocks walk back to my house. What a strange sight we must’ve been, me with my reddened shirt wrapped all around my face, husky at my side, mumbling to a man who seemed as scared as I. And yet I was also surprisingly calm. Time stopped. Thought stopped. Nothing else mattered, just one foot in front of the other. My wife, Maya, was awakened to see a bloody mess standing before her.

This whole experience, including the hospital emergency room personnel, was perfect. Knowing that this story could’ve turned out quite differently offers me even more incentive to live as fully as I can, transforming periodic complacency. My time here is precious. It’s not necessarily about accomplishing more, but about the quality of my being and how I allow myself expression. Will I inhabit this planet fully?

The man who lay in the hospital with his face torn open, singing, was not the “me” I have known in the past. Mr. Negative was nowhere in sight. In fact he hasn’t been seen for awhile, but under stress, might he return? Not this time. During this process

I had no concern of being irreparably wounded. If it was to be, it just would be. I'd found peace with however I'd turn out. Everyone was helping me, but was my essence also helping them?

Perhaps the most bizarre thing of all occurred as Maya and I were leaving the emergency room. Someone else had just left through the automatic double doors, and as we were about to reach them they came swinging rapidly to close, very narrowly missing smashing into my face. Can you imagine that? Our belly-laugh roars could be heard for some distance no doubt.

Much of what I certainly take for granted has been given a transformational nudge. My body and its physical dexterity have now tasted a mouthful of

infirmity. So much more awareness can be brought to even the simplest of tasks. We are given so many opportunities to allow our "selves" to be transformed for the better. Aren't these times demanding that we look into every crevice of our souls, to cultivate wondrous gardens within us, and then to share them with everyone?

Incredible blessings! As I explore the possible causes of my fainting, I'm simultaneously looking at the wondrous transformative gifts of being. Experiencing a sudden physical wounding provided the gift of knowing so much more about what resides within me, and that during these times of uncertainty, depending upon our vantage point, we will be ok. Thank you concrete reality, for a truly transformative process.



# Transformation Personified

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director, & Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister

Transformation lives in a  
seedy apartment complex.  
The same place he lived when  
his life was defined by blame and excuses.  
Despite bad memories and even worse neighbors—  
Sloth and Stagnation to the right,  
Suspicion and Fear on the left—  
it still felt like home.  
Comfortable.  
Familiar.

Transformation looks as though he belongs  
among the transients and tyrants,  
predators and prey,  
the street prophets and their flock:  
poor lost souls.  
He moves among them unnoticed.

Transformation is often misjudged.  
For one thing, his body  
is covered in black and blue ink.  
Angels and demons,  
Comedy and Tragedy,  
crucifix and chains,  
doves and ravens,  
permanent reminders  
of the impermanence  
and dualities in life.

It's no longer something he  
does to release the pain.  
He did that during the abuse  
before the escape,  
while incarcerated  
not rehabilitated,  
in the long, slow death  
before the fall.  
It was a fall so far,  
on a night so dark,  
he feared he'd never recover.  
And yet

with the help of one good friend  
and many great teachers  
he did.

Now his tattoos are a ritual  
to mark important moments in time.  
Sometimes they are scripture or lines of poetry  
that capture the liminal state  
between life and death,  
and flesh becomes word.

Once, during a snowstorm in April  
he was at home, reading and writing  
in the candlelight  
cast from an elaborate altar  
in his otherwise monastic room.  
That night, a fire destroyed most of the complex,  
sparing neither the righteous nor the wicked.

He wasn't angry when Suspicion and Fear  
falsely accused him.  
And he felt no vindication when investigators  
determined the cause  
to be an act of God, a lightning strike.

He was welcoming and  
hospitable when his  
neighbors came,  
to ask forgiveness,  
to make amends,  
to be redeemed.

Then he acquired  
a new tattoo.  
This time,  
it was a phoenix. †



## Further Reading:

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister

*Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* John Shelby Spong, Harper San Francisco, 1994. An insightful and articulate liberal Christian viewpoint.

*The Universe Story.* Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, Harper San Francisco, 1992. The history of the universe through the eyes of science and the humanities. It is the story of the transformation that created us and our civilization.

*Destructive Emotions: How Can We Overcome Them? A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama.* Narrated by Daniel Goleman, Bantam Books, 2003. A spiritual and scientific guide to transforming destructive emotions.

*The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life.* Laurie Beth Jones, Hyperion, 1996. A guide to transforming your work and life through articulating your personal vision and mission.

*Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice.* Paul Kivel. New Society Publishers 1996. An excellent resource for understanding and working to end racism. †



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- 1) Submit your text electronically via email. Plain text is best.
- 2) Include your name and daytime number.
- 3) Not all submissions will be published. Submissions may be edited.

Questions?  
Call Heather Hollingsworth at 743-2363.

# March Highlights

April 2	Art Exhibit: Jill Webb
April 3	Soulful Sundown
April 5	KISS/Joining Sunday
April 9	Day Alliance Luncheon
April 10	Good Friday Tenebrae Service - 12:00 noon All Soul Acoustic Coffeehouse: Kevin Welch
April 11	Day Alliance "High Tea" Fundraiser
April 12	Easter Sunday
April 17	Parents' Night Out
April 26	Coming of Age Worship Services
April 28	Evening Alliance

Due to the demand for spaces, the UUSC Dinner has been moved to Saturday, May 9. If you wish to host a neighborhood dinner in your home, please contact Greg Bledsoe, [bledsoe@aol.com](mailto:bledsoe@aol.com).

Sunday Service Times:  
10:00, 11:30 am

Soulful Sundown:  
7:00 pm, First Friday

Wednesday Connections:  
Supper 5:15, Chapel 6:30, Classes 7:00 pm