

Simple Gifts

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The All Souls Journal

Contemporary Worship and Transcendentalism

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister



The American Transcendentalists realized that reason alone is not enough in religion. In the early 1800s, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others spoke of “corpse cold” Unitarianism because its worship had become so intellectual that it had lost the

heart and spirit that moves the religious impulse. The Unitarians of that time were reacting to the spirited emotionalism and enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening in American religion.

The Second Great Awakening was a revival of large ecstatic preaching and worship much like evangelical revivals today. During the First and Second Great Awakenings in America, powerful preachers brought crowds of worshipers to experience an emotional and spiritual sensation that they defined as a conversion. The Unitarians of the time rebelled against such emotionalism, and felt that true conversion does not happen in a moment of high emotion, but rather through the deliberate progress of developing character through reason and action over a lifetime.

The Transcendentalists, for the most part, agreed that a moment of perceived illumination in worship (or otherwise) is not enough to convert a person forever from his or her failures, shortcomings and sins. Such a moment of enlightenment could, however, be the beginning of a new path for a person. But only if the path continued as a process that led a person, over

time, toward integrity and character. The Transcendentalists believed that people can have direct encounters with God through sensations and emotions that lead them to a deeper understanding of truth. However, even though the encounter may begin with a personal experience and sensation, that encounter should then be interpreted with the help of reason and intellect, rather than dogma and doctrine.

Some of the most famous Transcendentalists, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Theodore Parker, were also Unitarians. Yet, there was a conflict because the Transcendentalists’ belief, that truth can be attained through personal experience of the Spirit, was a radical and even heretical concept to Unitarians of the time. Unitarians, up until that point, believed that the Bible was the revelation of God and that reason was the way to interpret it to discover truth. The Transcendentalist idea that truth can be discovered outside of the Bible, was heretical to traditional 19th century Unitarians.



March: Transcendence

Is Anybody Out There? † Transcendence Deconstructed

The controversy over Transcendentalism led to major conflicts and divisions within Unitarian churches and among the entire denomination. After much controversy, and the threat of splitting the denomination, prominent Unitarian leaders focused the denomination's energy on "Things Commonly Believed Among Us." By concentrating on their commonalities and seeing their mutual interests, Unitarians were able to accept the Transcendentalists as a respected and honored part of their churches. The denomination did not feel it needed to be one or the other, but that Unitarianism was large enough for both expressions. The spiritual father of All Souls in Tulsa, the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, was one of the key leaders who helped hold the denomination together.

Amazingly enough, at All Souls in Tulsa, right now we are reliving history in a uniquely 21st century way. Here's how. The music in both of our Sunday services is profoundly moving, and we have great diversity of music in both services. Yet, the celebration music, that is specific to the Contemporary Service, creates a particular emotional high-point experience every week for those who are so inclined. This experience is a transcendental experience, but it is also rooted in the Great Awakening form of worship. For some, the experience created by the celebration music can be likened to an experience on a mountain top watching a sunset, in that it evokes a powerful feeling of connection and uplift that does not come through reason.

There is, however, a significant difference between All Souls' Contemporary Service and the Great Awakening and Revivalist forms of religiosity. In those former traditions, after creating a highly emotional and moving experience in worship, the clergy interpreted and defined the experience and its meaning through doctrine and dogma. At All Souls, on the other hand, we offer people ways to interpret the experience through thoughtful sermons and classes and writings (like this one) that are grounded in reason and free of dogma and doctrine.

For those who cannot relate to the emotional experience of contemporary worship, a close analogy could be found in the recent description I heard of the Bruce Springsteen concert in Tulsa. The person described being swept up in the music at Springsteen's concert and found himself clapping and moving and raising his hands in the air with great exuberance. He experienced such an emotional high that he felt he was sharing a very special moment with everyone there. People at All Souls who are attending the Contemporary Service are having a Bruce Springsteen concert-like feeling every week in our sanctuary, and it is feeding their spirits when it is combined with the rest of what we offer. When you combine that emotional experience of connection and uplift with our message, and the music of our other choirs, our covenant and history, our Sunday school, and our programs, you have a very special religious expression firmly rooted in Unitarianism and Universalism.

At the same time, All Souls' Traditional Service continues to provide a unique and powerful experience of intellectual and spiritual uplift and connection that is set in a more classical Unitarian and Universalist liturgical style. Just like in ages past, there is plenty of room for both expressions, as long as we keep our focus on *the things commonly believed among us.* †



Speaking of Transcendence

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister



There was a mystic who had just returned from the desert and the people surrounded him and asked, "What did you learn? What was God like?" The mystic felt trapped by language. How could he ever tell them what he had experienced in his heart? Can God be put into words? Finally, moved by their persistence, the

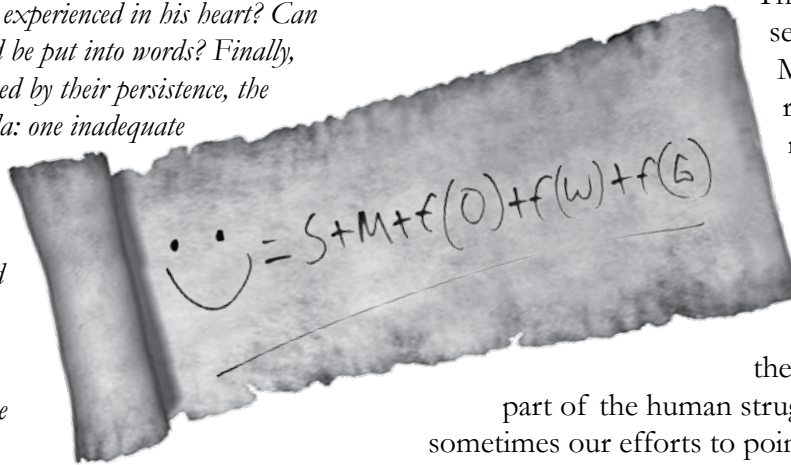
mystic gave them a formula: one inadequate and inaccurate – but given with the hope that some of them, even one of them, might be tempted to experience it for themselves.

The people seized upon the formula. They made it a sacred text. They imposed it on others as a holy belief. They went to great pains to spread it in foreign lands. Some even gave their lives for it. The mystic was sad. It might have been better if he had said nothing. And yet, how could he possibly have kept silent about such an important experience?

In a sense, human beings are label makers. We take transcendent, holy, and ephemeral experiences of feeling connected to something larger than ourselves and box them into the confines of our language, culture, and limited understanding. We select the letters and out come the generally inadequate labels: **God, Heaven, Spirit, Soul, Love, Awareness, Transcendence.** But these are just words on paper. The dictionary won't help much. It's just another finger pointing in the direction of truth. The meaning of these words, the truth of these words, lies somewhere between the speaker, the word itself, and the person listening. Meaning-making is always a collaborative process.

Why share these experiences at all if no one will understand? To connect. To be seen. To move one step closer to being understood. If someone is sharing a transcendent moment with you, check

your logic calculator at the door and stay a moment in the process. They are sharing something very meaningful and have moved to a place of vulnerability. Moving too fast to critique could damage the relationship.



The ancient tale, preserved by Anthony De Mello and cited above, reminds us of the margin of error in communicating some of our most precious experiences. I am comforted, to some extent, knowing that the difficulty has been

part of the human struggle for centuries. And sometimes our efforts to point others to the vast and inexpressible direction beyond what they have experienced, leaves them staring, dumbfounded, at the tip of our finger.

Fortunately, the human experience is an amazing one and our capacity for understanding is vast. Our imagination can take us from hearing only a few notes being played to remembering an entire score and spouting out a title in just the flash of a second. Label making is a human endeavor and it's great for short cuts, how-tos, and ordering from the drive-through. But we have done something more with our labels. We have infused them with the power of metaphor and symbols that go well beyond the confines of the language itself. And though we may not be experiencing the same thing, I believe there is enough beauty in this world to maintain me through most misunderstandings.

Share your transcendent experiences with someone who may not know you've had one. You might find they understand in part, in full, or in process. But the good news is, at least you will have been with someone you care about that much longer. And the more you are in relationship, the more you are in conversation. The more you are in conversation, the more likely you are to be understood. †

Is Anybody Out There?

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Minister of Pastoral Care



Once there was a little girl who had a big imagination. She loved making up stories. It was fun to imagine new and interesting worlds.

This little girl, Amy, especially loved being outside. Every chance she got, she put on her special adventure shoes (the ones that hardly left footprints) and her special adventure hat (the one that made her practically invisible) and traveled to her favorite places to see what she could see.

One day, Amy put on her special adventure shoes and hat and went to her neighbor's backyard garden. It was a very nice garden, cool and inviting, with freshly turned soft earth and interesting flowers and bushes. Plus, her neighbor, Mrs. Green, encouraged Amy's explorations and made great banana nut bread. Amy knew that banana nut bread could be used to stave off hunger and malnutrition while she explored new worlds.

Amy liked to read about all kinds of worlds – worlds within the ocean, the earth, and the sky. Anyway, on this one particular spring day, Amy discovered an interesting spot in Mrs. Green's backyard garden. Now, to the average person, it probably looked like just a bit of dirt with a few small rocks and bits of twigs. To Amy, it looked like a cleverly camouflaged bug village, a different world.

So, Amy carefully sat down near the bit of dirt. Amy was very patient. She waited and waited and waited. Then, she saw first one and then another pill bug move into the area. (Amy called them roly-polies.) Amy observed them

for a very long time. Then, she couldn't help herself. She had to pick one up. Carefully, she placed her hand, palm up, in the path of one of the roly-polies. When she positioned her finger so that it was even with the dirt, the roly-poly walked onto her hand as if it were a ramp.

Fascinated, Amy kept positioning her hands so that the roly-poly traveled but never really went anywhere – it just kept going from one of Amy's hands to the other. Amy felt all of its many tiny feet. She wondered, "Does this roly-poly see me? Does this roly-poly have a family? What is this roly-poly thinking?" Amy discovered that she wanted to help the roly-polies.

Amy returned the roly-poly to the bit of dirt and thought about how she could help. After she watched them for a long time, Amy noticed that it was growing darker. A few raindrops began to fall. "Oh, no!" Amy thought. "The roly-polies might drown! They need a home." Amy worked quickly. She gathered together the small stones and bits of twigs. She fashioned a tiny house for the roly-polies and placed them in it. Then she thought, "They need to be safe from dangerous birds and frogs and things that might eat them." Amy made a wall around the house – like a fort. She waited to see how the grateful roly-polies would respond.



However, the roly-polies kept climbing out of their beautiful new house. They kept climbing over the walls. Amy thought, "They just don't know that this is good for them. It will take them awhile to understand." So, Amy kept ever so gently picking up the roly-polies and placing them back within the walls. This constant effort took all of Amy's concen

tration and focus. She realized that, whether they understood it or not, the roly-polies weren't going to stay in their protective space. Then, she realized that her stomach was growling. All her hard work of thinking and caring and planning and building and protecting had made her hungry.

Mrs. Green welcomed Amy to join her on her back porch. Together, they ate the delicious, nutritious banana nut bread that was warm from the oven. "What adventure are you having today?" Mrs. Green asked. "It is a very serious adventure," Amy replied. "I need to think about it."

Amy thought about it the rest of the day. She thought about it before she went to sleep. Amy wondered, "Do roly-polies know about God? Was I sort of like a god to them?" Amy didn't know what to think about God. Would she like it if God decided to put her in a different house behind protective walls? She didn't think so. Amy thought about things like that for a long time.

As Amy grew older, she thought about how things look differently close up than they do from a distance. She looked at pictures of the earth taken from way out in space. She remembered her roly-poly adventure from when she was young. If she were a Big Powerful Something for the roly-polies, what sort of Big Powerful Something existed Out There? The older she became the more she wished that people and animals and bugs and rocks and trees and oceans and mountains and everything could live together peacefully. She wished that everyone could imagine what it would be like to be a roly-poly. She wished that everyone could imagine what it would be like to be so large that Planet Earth looked like a beautiful, blue marble. Then, she wished that after being that big and powerful, everyone could be small again and treat each other and the whole planet with respect.

Amy is not the only person who thinks and wonders and imagines. Vaclav Havel, the poet, writer, and

former president of Czechoslovakia and then the Czech Republic, thought about these things, too. In a 1994 speech, he talked about awareness of being "anchored in the earth and the universe" and "that we are not here alone or for ourselves alone, but that we are an integral part of higher, mysterious entities." He was speaking of moving toward self-transcendence.



Self-transcendence is something that comes to us through our sacred stories and our collective wisdom – including that of our children. Inasmuch as we are able to hold these mysteries in our hearts and minds, we will be able to continue to work to create a just, peaceful world.

I wish you the joy of discovery. I wish you the courage to explore these ideas and feelings in our community of all compassionate questioning souls. Surely, these are the blessings of being in right relationship. Then we can say: Yes. Somebody is Out There. We are. †

1) Vaclav Havel, *The Need for Transcendence in the Post-modern World*, speech delivered in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, July 4, 1994, accessed online.



Dear Graduating Seniors:

As I prepare to watch you leave the comfort and familiarity of the family we have created during your time here at All Souls, I wanted to give you something useful to put into your coping skills-duffle bag to help you transcend the stress of leaving home for the first time.

As your Youth Director, I thought it my job to send you off with parting words on discovering the great mystery that both surrounds and is at the core of who you are. I wanted to instruct you in ways to go beyond what your five senses and rational mind tell you and discern the still small voice of the divine. I thought of techniques I could impart to ensure that you are able to rise above your own self-interests to become a part of something greater and grander and much more meaningful than you can imagine.

But then, I remembered, college is so not about that. Transcendent moments happen when we're alone, still, in silence, amid the grandeur of nature, inspired by great music, moved by participation in some ancient and mystic ritual. College is crowded and fast-paced and loud and happens mostly indoors in imposing, over-compensating granite buildings. Most of the music you'll hear will not induce that kind of rapture, and the rituals will not inspire devotion (hopefully).

So, never mind. Forget about going to the mountaintop and go dancing instead. Forget about sitting in silent solitude and go hang out with a group of people who are absolutely nothing like you and your parents might even find them weird. Forget about exploring your inner terrain and go on a road trip.

Experiment! Not with mind-altering drugs, but with mind-expanding classes – in art and literature and animal husbandry and, of course, some that apply to your major. College is about discourse and discord and discovering who you are in relation to others who are not in your family. Transcendent moments are beyond words, cannot be argued, and have nothing to do with anyone else but your communion with that which always was and always will be.

Really, despite my desire to provide a practical how-to on finding the spiritual in the mundane, the eternal in the mortal, the certainty in what can't be proved, it's beyond my skill set. Sages and profits way smarter than me can only point us toward the ultimate reality, provide maps and guideposts.

Otherwise, it's a solitary journey we each have to discover on our own, after college, when we've gotten a job and can provided for our own basic needs and have the time and motivation to seek what the yogis call bliss, Maslow calls self-actualization, and some Unitarians call hysterical blindness.

All I could do is encourage you to find a regular spiritual practice – exercise, yoga, meditation, prayer, journaling, lectio divina – something from among those methods already proven over thousands of year to relax and center and ground you in your most authentic self. This will help manage the stress of being on your own for the first time and, as a bi-product, will create the right environment for transcendent moments to occur.

But don't listen to me. Go. Enjoy your freedom and this exciting adventure. And, when you're through, come back and we'll look at the maps toward God together.

All my love,
Kate Starr, Youth Director †



Goodbye from Sarah Gettie

-by Sarah Gettie Burks, Intern Minister



As I look back over the past nine months I have been the Intern Minister at All Souls, I realize I have been called upon to transcend who I was before and my old skill set time and time again. I have grown from

my time here more than I ever thought possible. My worldview and understanding of myself have expanded. But perhaps, most importantly, my understanding and experience of myself as a minister has deepened in unforeseen ways.

I came to All Souls knowing that I had been called here to learn something phenomenal. In preparation, I was told just how much this congregation loves their interns, that I would be cared for and guided through my ministerial growth process in a congregation that holds their ministers accountable, but does so with grace and ease. And those who told me were absolutely correct.

I am incredibly grateful to Panny McElroy and the McElroy family for their support of educating interns in ministerial excellence. Internships such as the one at All Souls allow our ministers to enter their first parish with well-developed skills in the areas of creating and leading worship and life cycle rituals, teaching, community involvement, social justice work, administration, and pastoral care, as well as ownership of themselves as ministers. I am also incredibly grateful for the the John B. Wolf Preaching Scholarship opportunity, and to work with the fantastic committee that caringly strives and pushes for excellence in preaching. I still have some distance to go, but I would not be close to where I am today in preaching without their assistance.

I am indebted to all of the ministers and staff of All Souls. Marlin, Tamara, and Debra have all guided me on my path to ministerial formation by challenging me with much love and care. They are

at the forefront of our movement, and I am ever so grateful for having the opportunity to work with them. It is a privilege and an honor to call them my colleagues. Working with our vastly talented, committed staff of beautiful hearts and souls has likewise been an honor and a privilege. They have shown me much patience and gentle guidance, and have encouraged me as I found my way in this community.

But, I am most especially indebted to you, the congregants who form the body of this phenomenal church in the heartland of the United States. Without you, none of the groundbreaking work that's going on at this church would be possible. You are at the heart and soul of the Unitarian Universalist movement, and by becoming the most radically inclusive church in Tulsa, you are living our values to the fullest. Through classes, leading worship, and being invited to share in your personal struggles and triumphs, you have lovingly welcomed me to share in your lives. We have laughed together, cried together, praised together, and questioned together. Through your enthusiasm and curiosity, I have learned so very much this year. I will forever remember the love you showed me, the humor we have shared, your words of encouragement when I was so terribly intimidated about going before all those people in the sanctuary!

At the end of May, I will finish my post as Intern Minister at All Souls. I'll travel some throughout Oklahoma and the Southwest before returning to Chicago to finish my final year of classes and to see the Ministerial Fellowship Committee in September. Where my ministry will take me is yet to be decided. But one thing is certain: I will never forget the incredibly important role you have played in my life and my ministry.

With many, many bows, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. †

Transcendentalism Lives On

-by John Connelly



Early American Unitarians and Universalists considered themselves one of the many Christian sects. So how did these two groups come to see themselves as something unique from Christianity and eventually combine? The link between these early American denominations and our modern UU version is *Transcendentalism*.

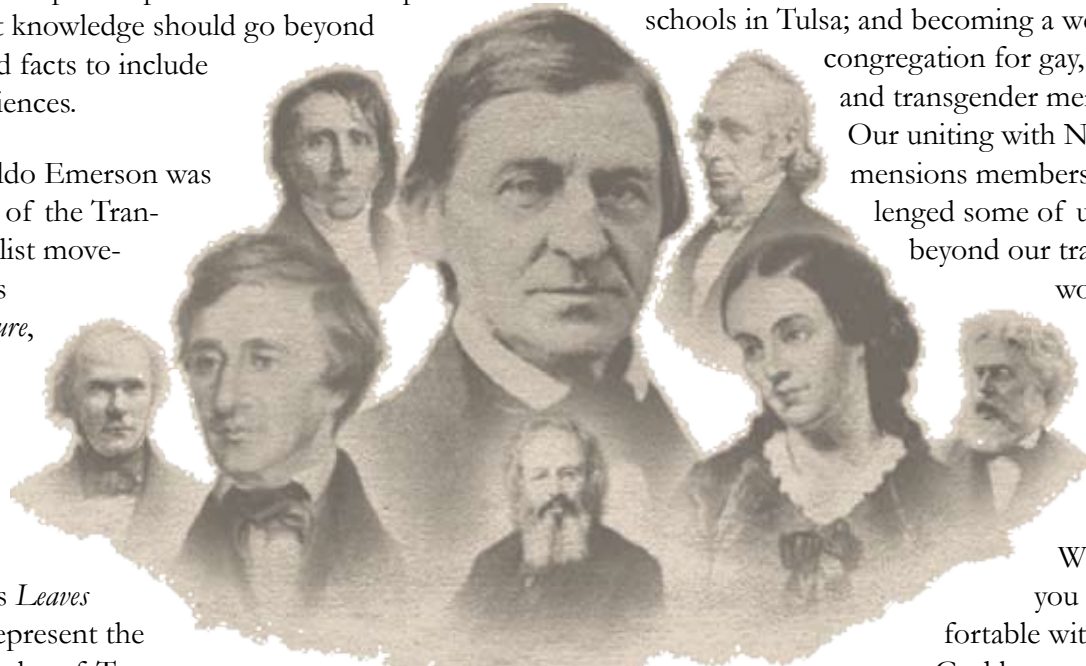
To transcend means basically to go beyond that which we know. Many times we actually “feel” the sensation beyond our five senses that there is something more in our own lives – for example, when we are alone in nature or in a group of people bound by a common purpose. Transcendentalism is a philosophical movement emphasizing that knowledge should go beyond reason and facts to include our experiences.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the leader of the Transcendentalist movement. His essay *Nature*, Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, and Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* represent the best examples of Transcendentalist writings. Transcendentalists believed that people were naturally religious but that religion should go beyond the revelation contained in the Bible to include our own experiences in nature, from literature, and through relationships. Transcendentalism is how Unitarian

Universalists now go beyond our Judeo Christian roots to recognize that our sources of religious inspiration include nature, personal experiences, wisdom from world religions, humanist teachings, and the examples set through the lives of women and men.

Transcendentalism influenced Unitarians and Universalists to go beyond thinking solely about their religion, to thinking about how to apply their religious principles in society. This led Theodore Parker to become a noted abolitionist, Horace Mann to champion universal education, Dorothea Dix to improve conditions for the mentally ill, and Susan B. Anthony to become a suffragist.

At All Souls, we have continued to honor our Transcendentalist influences by establishing micro banks in Central America; adopting at-risk schools in Tulsa; and becoming a welcoming congregation for gay, lesbian, and transgender members. Our uniting with New Dimensions members has challenged some of us to go beyond our traditional worship experience and transcend our religious practice. Whether you are comfortable with or without God language, with or without movement, with or without a style of music and/or service, honor our Transcendentalist heritage – go beyond what you know and experience something different. That kind of open-minded, open-hearted approach is what makes us a liberal religion. †



“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”

~Henry Brooks Adams

Thank you to our Adult Religious Education teachers for their lasting influence in our lives and the life of the church.

Claudia Arthrell	Ros Elder	Dr. Chad Johnson	Janet Parachin
Millie Arthrell	Wally Exon	Rusty Johnson	Gina Pearson
Dr. Janet Adams-Westcott	Linda Ford	Robert Katz	Dr. Nancy Pittman
Darlene Backhaus	Rick Fortner	Karen Keith	Stacie Pryor
Aaron Bean	Rev. Debra Garfinkel	William Kellough	Rev. Ron Robinson
Ann Blakely	Earl Goodman	Jean Kline	Julie Skye
LaDonna Boyd	Adam Green	Rev. Marlin Lavanhar	Scott Swearingen
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Rev. Michael Dowd	Ann Jackman	Jane Newman	
Diane Dudley	John Jacobs	Joe Nurre	
Cathey Edwards	Becky Johnson	Rev. Victor Parachin	

Transcending: Eliminating Emotional Masochism

-From the book "Eastern Wisdom for Western Minds" by Rev. Victor Parachin

In the end these things matter most:
 How well did you love?
 How fully did you love?
 How deeply did you learn to let go?
 -The Buddha

A long, long time ago, there were two holy men traveling together through the countryside. They came upon a beautiful young woman sitting and sobbing by the side of a stream. Concerned, one of the monks asked her what was wrong. "I need to cross this river but I can't swim and I am afraid of drowning," she explained. Without hesitation, the monk picked up the woman, carrying her to the other side of the stream, where he gently put her down. She thanked him profusely.

As the monks walked away, the second monk turned to the first, demanding, "How could you do

such a thing? We have taken vows of poverty and chastity. It is forbidden even to talk to a woman, let alone touch one."

The first monk listened and succinctly replied, "When I came to the other side of the river, I put her down. Why are you still carrying her?"

That story raises this question for us today: What are you carrying around that you should have put down and left behind long ago? An incredible number of people go through their entire lives carrying feelings of regret, guilt, anger, disappointment, rage, and even hate. Unwittingly they practice an emotional masochism that continues to haunt and hurt them. By not letting go, they remain trapped inside prisons of their own construction. Today, resolve to be like the monk who put the beautiful woman down and moved on with his life. Don't carry your emotional baggage any longer. Let it go!

All Souls Singers Bloom in Washington, DC

-by Deanna Tirrell



Amid cherry blossoms and raindrops, while viewing monuments and museums, All Souls Children's and Youth Choirs shared their music with a wide variety of audiences on their annual trip, April 1-5, 2009 to Washington DC.

Music follows you when traveling with a choir, and the young singers proved this as they burst into an impromptu performance of *The Star-Spangled Banner* on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Other visitors to the famous statue applauded and sang along as the choirs were directed by All Souls Associate Director of Music David Smith.

The next opportunity to share this song took place at an NBA basketball game between the Washington Wizards and the Miami Heat. The choirs opened the game from center court. The tie-dyed red, white, and blue shirts stood out in the crowd, and the singers received many congratulations and well-wishes from other fans at the game.

Another event the children participated in was a special Festival Sunday at Washington, DC's All Souls Church, Unitarian. Here is the story of this special day, the roots of which are based in tragedy and end in love:

In 1948, inspired by the sermons of the Rev. A. Powell Davies, children at All Souls collected almost half a ton of school supplies to send to children in Hiroshima, Japan. In appreciation, the school children

in Hiroshima created original works of art in crayon, water color, pen, and calligraphic brush, which they sent back to All Souls as gifts.

The children's pictures depicted not the horror of the war, but the everyday beauty of nature and friendship. The pictures were displayed at the church, then carefully stored, only to be seen when the occasional Japanese tourist bus would knock at the church's door and ask to see them.

These pictures have been restored, and they were again dedicated as Gifts of Peace and Hope on Sunday, April 5. The All Souls Tulsa Children's and Youth Choirs provided music for the worship service, which included traditional Japanese music and dance, and, of course, cherry blossoms. The U.S. Ambassador from Japan and his wife were also in attendance.

The singers bloomed as they shared their talents, enjoyed new experiences, and learned important life skills (like how to get 58 people on one subway train before the doors close in 90 seconds!). Thank you to everyone in the church who made the trip possible. †



“Do the thing you think you cannot do.”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

by Sarah Gettie Burks, Intern Minister

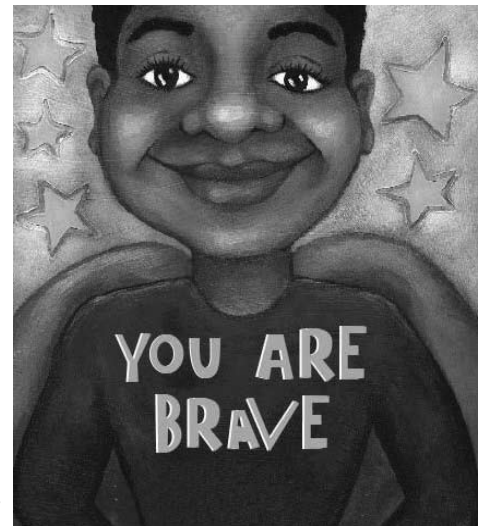


This world often asks us to transcend what we know we are capable of, to grow and expand in unforeseen ways. When we have a child, we grow into being parents; when we lose our parents, we quickly realize we are the eldest generation in the family; new jobs and new responsibilities challenge us to deepen our life experiences and skills perhaps beyond what we had thought possible. We are amazing creatures and we are capable of much more than many of us imagine. We have the potential for constant growth. While our bodies eventually cease to grow taller and we begin to wrinkle and slow down, our understanding of God and ourselves can continue to expand and deepen unto our very last breath, as even the process of death reveals so much about what it means to be alive and in relationship with one another and with God.

Draw your journey of self-transcendence. Sit down with some colorful markers, watercolors, or oil pastels and a piece of paper and begin to mark your life journey. Make special note of moments in your life when you did something that surprised even you – when you were able to transcend the old you and grow into that which was unexpected. When did you do the thing you thought you could not do?

Create a list of transcendent activities for the future. Would you like to mend past relationships with family or friends, learn to sky-dive, begin a regular meditation practice, go back to school or begin preparation for a new career? Our time in this life is limited, but our capacities are nearly endless. What might you do next to live into your fullest capacity and to make the most of this life?

Transcendence requires surrender and ‘leaning into our fears.’ It requires breaking out of the familiar, risk, willingness to try something new, and acceptance of possible failure. Consider what might be holding you back? Is it your ego and fear of appearing before others as though you had failed? Is it possible disappointment in yourself? How do these fears compare with the courage it takes to stick your neck out and attempt to transcend who you once were? If you find fear getting in the way of reaching your goal, focus on how courageous you have been in coming as far as you have. Often, the courageous process of beginning a journey to transcendence is even more rewarding than the final goal.



Pray about it.

I know when I find myself getting in the way of allowing God or my highest potential to work through me, it's time to pray about letting go. I often have to ask for surrender of my ego and my need to control the outcome. When I am able to put aside my expectations, both for myself and for others, the results are often more magnificent than I had ever imagined. The process of transcendence is something both you and God share, so leave some room for God to work in your life. The results will be fantastic, for you and for all whose lives you touch.

May transcendence bless your life and your work in this world each and every day. †

Coming of Age Boston

-by April Gordon

At 5:00 am, March 16, 2009, 22 students from the Coming of Age program arrived at the Tulsa airport for our trip to Boston. Huddled in a circle and half-asleep, we received some encouraging words from Kate Starr as she attempted to arouse our sense of adventure.

“I want you to forget about what you think this trip will be like,” she advised us. “All of your preconceived ideas and expectations are wrong. This is going to be different from anything you imagined. I want you to live in the moment, stay alert, and be open to everything.” Though not many of us believed her at first, as the trip progressed we began to see her point. No amount of briefing or planning could have prepared us for the amazing journey that lay ahead.

I, for one, was just amazed by the beauty and rich history of the city of Boston. As we walked the streets (which we did a lot) our eyes were drawn to the elaborate architecture of 17th century churches, courthouses, and graveyards directly alongside 21st century skyscrapers. The seamless mix of old and new, along with Boston’s extremely diverse population, created an experience unlike any to be found in our sleepy city of Tulsa. As Kate repeated many times, it was as if we could “see the ghosts.”



Besides the mind-blowing architecture, we were staggered by the plentiful reminders of Unitarian history in Boston. During our stay, we visited King’s Chapel – the very first Unitarian church in the United States.



On Sunday morning, we were able to attend a service at the Arlington Street Church, where the Tiffany windows are esteemed throughout the world. During the service, I was astonished at the general grandeur and architecture of the place. The high-arched ceilings, detailed wall moldings, and stunning stained-glass windows were all breathtaking, and left me in reverence of the countless worshippers of earlier generations who had sat there before me.

Though amazed, I could not help noticing that the church’s actual service was somewhat less spectacular. For the first time, I was really able to appreciate All Souls – our large, friendly, and diverse congregation, our inspiring music, and, most importantly, the engaging sermons and leadership of our ministers – Marlin, Tamara, and Debra. It was during the service at Arlington that I came to realize how unique and valuable All Souls really is, and, I must say, it made me proud to call this church my own.

Perhaps my favorite part of the trip was our visit to Walden Pond. At the pond, we were able to see the original site of the famous Thoreau cabin and were given an hour of meditation and journaling time.

During my hour, I walked around the pond and was struck by its natural, raw beauty. It was stunning, with a thin layer of ice frosting the water, creating a dazzling sheen that blinded me as I looked across the surface. It was also completely silent, making for the perfect peaceful and reflective atmosphere. At Walden, I believe that my credo statement really took shape for the first time.

And, of course, something has to be said for the shopping in Boston. Many in the group were attracted to stores like Urban Outfitters. I was drawn more to the small, local shops and boutiques, where I was able to quench my liberal thirst for the week. I felt that my tireless shopping was not in

vain when I purchased a 4-inch Obama action figure. I was also made aware that liberal buttons were not in short supply; one of my friends spent over \$40 on witty buttons for his hat.

I would not trade my Boston Coming of Age experience for anything. It was on this journey that I truly bonded with the 9th grade group for the first time, made invaluable friendships, and learned more about myself and my religious beliefs as a Unitarian Universalist. For me, this pilgrimage gave new meaning to what it truly means to be a Unitarian – a bonding of love, compassion, and vision for a better humanity. †



The 2009 Coming of Age Class: Alec Brown, Paige Clark, James Colpitts, Ruby Connelly, Chelsie Downie, Olivia Egan, April Gordon, Kevin Hickey, Dillon Hollingsworth, Alex Leonovich, Ross Martin, Jeff May, Miranda McClung, Brandon Miller, Angel Ogundare, Halla Parke, Julian Pearson, Hawken Rives, Will Scmitz, Will Smith, Jenna Staggs, and Harmony Stephens. (Not pictured: Cherish Mason)

Transcendence Deconstructed

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

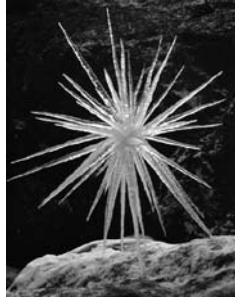
When people ask what I do
I find it difficult to put into words.
I am an artist.
Yet all I do is pay attention
and participate in the space around me.
I plug in and point out what already exists.
When I'm really in the zone, it feels like dancing
with all of the Earth at once.

When I work, a theme calls to me
from the twigs and flowers,
the icicles and snow,
from the leaves and pinecones,
the sand and mud.
I use my bare hands, my teeth,
and found tools
to prepare and arrange the materials.
With this perfect palette,
a mathematical model,
my skill, and a little luck
I sculpt the golden ratio,
the universal mandala,
the interconnected web.

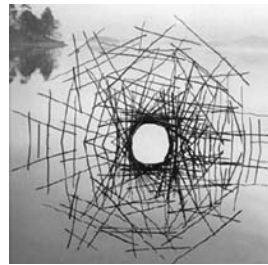
My goal is to work with nature
as she presents herself to me,
and add my gifts to hers.
It takes courage
to work with the delicacies of nature,
but I have to.
Some of my new works I even find disturbing,
in the same way that nature is somewhat disturbing.
The landscape is often perceived as pastoral, pretty,
something to be enjoyed
as a backdrop to our leisure time.
But anyone who works the land knows
that is not the whole picture.
Nature can be harsh – difficult and brutal
as well as beautiful.
You can't walk five minutes in nature
without coming across something dead and decaying.
But when we pay attention to all aspects of nature
we see it is also mysterious, paradoxical,
trans-rational, and comforting.

Like my art, my life is complex.
Sometimes I am the one balancing on a fine point
appearing as though I could teeter in either direction
at any moment.
But physics holds me steady, too.

My entire life,
and what I've learned over 30 years of doing this work
informs what I am creating now.
I want to continue this cycle
of learning and co-creating
until my own death and decay prevent me
from actively participating anymore.
Then I shall return to the earth
and the sea.



Sculptures by
Andy Goldsworthy

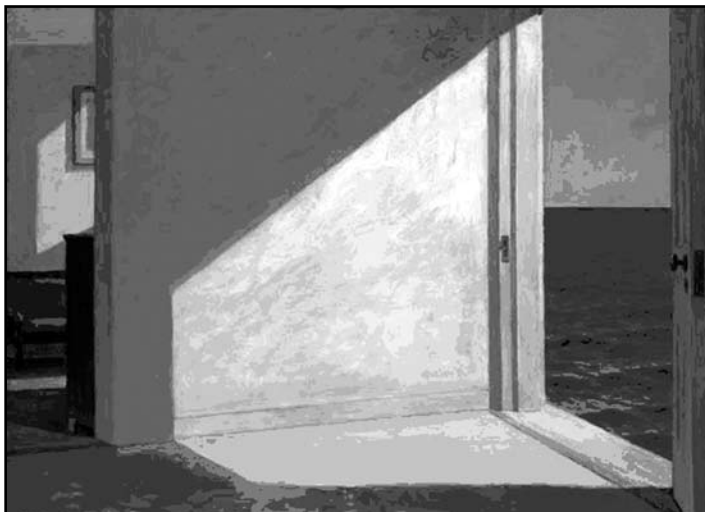


The photographer for this collection of
nature sculptures is an artist as well,
choosing the lenses, the angle,
and what detail to put at the center.
She has, in my opinion,
a more difficult task than I.
It is she who must reduce
multiple dimensions to two.
In a way, the photographs make my work
more accessible

and more beautiful,
documenting the relationship,
the peak experience of the work,
and its life unfolding over time.
Her photos
allow me to see the work
through her eyes.
Sometimes I feel I am actually

learning more about her than my work,
and I appreciate that,
for we are all part of this creation, too.
On the other hand,
sometimes the frame cuts out too much.
The inadequacy of freezing a piece in space and time
can feel like the death of my intention,
and I grieve the limitations of the medium.
Just like I am cursing the constraints
of these words. †





Transcendence by the Sea

-by Susan Tillman

At first glance, readers may think John Hollander's poem *The Front Room* is inspired by the rooms we cannot see in Edward Hopper's painting *Rooms by the Sea*.

However, the poem's epigraph is:

It may recall
An earlier glimpse of emptiness, a corner
Of a room by the sea, opening seemingly
Onto an uncontainable expanse of ocean

These words position readers in approximately the same space as does the slice of light that illuminates an interior and exterior space for viewers a space which for artist and poet, transmogrifies solid and liquid.

To step right out of the room into the sea
Directly as if the land outside had all vanished with some
Silent "Boom!"

Verses two through four are dedicated to the description of the movement from the one into the other. Each description suggests an unfamiliar, yet welcome and challenging, way to move.

Verse Two begins:

"How grandly liberating it could be."
Verse three suggests:
"How shockingly stabilizing it should be."
Verse four claims:
"How nonchalant yet stirring it might be."

The poet assures us that traveling across the threshold that divides the room and the sea demands some kind of exchange, a change in perspective:

As if suddenly there were nothing more about perspective that
We could assume
How seemingly possible, yet it can't be. . . †

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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.

May Highlights

May 1	Soulful Sundown
May 3	KISS/Joining Sunday New Member Recognition Congregational Meeting
May 9	Unitarian Universalist Social Committee Dinner
May 10	Flower Communion Family Worship Services Children's & Youth Choir Spring Concert
May 14	Day Alliance
May 15	Parents' Night Out All Soul Acoustic Coffeehouse: Boulder Acoustic Society
May 17	Graduation Sunday Adult Music Spring Concert
May 19	Evening Alliance

We will continue to have two Sunday worship services throughout the summer.