

Further Along My Spiritual Journey: Souvenirs from an Unexpected Detour

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Our opening words this morning have been adapted from writing by Joan Montages of Canada taken from the book One and Universal.

We light this chalice to remind ourselves of that flame which burns in each of our hearts.

Remembering that when flame meets flame,
Match meets candle,
The two become one,
Belonging to each other.

Many flames join together to form the warmth of community, of congregation, of city, of nation.

We gather here together to remind ourselves of our inner lights and join with others to light the way to a good world community.

But before we can shine a light on that path, we must remind ourselves who we are, and we must know who we are.

We are Unitarians, Universalists, friends, visitors, seekers.

Let us be together.

Each life is filled with ups and downs, joys and sorrows. Each life is made rich by them both. Please accept an invitation to come forward to shine a light on your joy or sorrow this day.

Like Bob Duryea said a couple of weeks ago, I too signed up for this date A long Time Ago in a Land Far, Far Away. I too thought, "That seems safe". How could I know what an unexpected detour life would take to provide me with such a RICH and decidedly UNSAFE topic?

In the past this fellowship has run a series of talks from our members entitled My Spiritual Journey. They were fantastic. All of them. Learning where our

fellows have come from allows for a deeper understanding and relationship. Going through the process of writing down your own spiritual journey allows you to know yourself better, have compassion for yourself and others and frees you of some of your hair. All kidding aside, it can be difficult to put such a lofty topic into words and yet it is extremely rewarding.

Let me start this talk today with a reading from Joy Crowley from the same book One and Universal. This reading reminds me of these Spiritual Journey talks we've so enjoyed here. And maybe it will inspire you to write about your spiritual journey as well.

ROADS

I enjoy looking at other people's roads.
They are different from mine
And yet basically the same.
They all facilitate journey
From here to there,
From self to other,
And they and are interconnected.

The fact that I love my own road
With its comfortable landmarks
And familiar faces,
Doesn't restrict my appreciation
Of someone else's neighborhood.

And if I go into another area
And walk a mile or two with someone else,
I return as a larger being.
The love of my own road is deepened,
The appreciation of other roads is widened,
And I am blessed in the knowledge
That all roads lead me Home.

May a trip on my road today be a blessing to you.

Recently my husband and I watched a movie called the Ultimate Gift. If you haven't seen it go get it today and watch it. It is quite a lovely movie. A grandfather passes and through his will and a series of videos he makes his grandson go through a series of tests, which all provide him with different gifts. If he passes all the tests he receives the Ultimate Gift. I've been thinking of this concept in relation to recent events in my life. These gifts or souvenirs I've received recently are irreplaceable and I'd like to share a few of them with you today.

On June 10th, just 4 weeks to do the day after losing our dearest friend Billy, we came home to find our home being raided by the local sheriff's department. Shock on top of shock ensued. Despair was at my door to be sure. I won't share you with the gory details of our grief and our case today but instead will share with you some of the gifts we've received along the way. We've worked hard for these gifts and we cherish them. I will never forget them.

LOVE - The writing of your Spiritual Journey is a process. Part of my process has been to learn to rely on my own inner wisdom for inspiration! To learn to quote myself so to speak. So many speakers tend to rely on quotes by the famous, the gurus only. Don't get me wrong – there are some great quotes out there and I'll use some of them later. But how did their quotes get famous – you guessed it –they had to say it or write it first. So I've come up with and really relied on my own personal quote with respect to love. Here it is: It is important that those who love you love you. It is unimportant that those who do not love you do not love you. Feel free to quote me on that. ☺

We have experienced the love and support of so many friends, family and supporters that I've hardly noticed that there are those who are not supportive of us in this community. Truly our friends and family have lifted us up and held us there and carried us when we couldn't. My outlook on people and what it means to love and be loved has been altered forever through this experience, especially coming on the heels of losing someone we love so dearly. I am going to read to you a poem that I think expresses it best. I have loved this poem for many, many years and just recently it has resurfaced as one of the pillars of strength and one of the pillows I cry on.

Loyalty

He may be six kinds of a liar,
He may be ten kinds of a fool,
He may be a wicked highflyer
Beyond any reason or rule;

There may be a shadow above him
Of ruin and woes to impend,
And I may not respect, but I love him,
Because-well, because he's my friend.

I know he has faults by the billion,
But his faults are a portion of him;
I know that his record's vermilion,
And he's far from the sweet Seraphim;
But he's always been square with yours truly,
Ready to give or to lend,
And if he is wild and unruly,
I like him-because he's my friend.

I criticize him but I do it
In just a frank, comradely key,
And back-biting gossips will rue it
If ever THEY knock him to me!
I never make diagrams of him,
No maps of his soul have I penned;
I don't analyze-I just love him,
Because-well, because he's my friend.

Berton Braley

Today, I am ever so grateful that there are those out there that feel this way about us – it truly makes all the difference.

Better than any poem can say people have shown us their love in their hugs and kisses, their kind words, offerings of yoga, or tea, or just time together without questions and in the letters we've asked for to support our character in court.

Those letters are now in book we will cherish forever and will help us to remember that it is important that those who love you love you and it is entirely unimportant that those who do not love you do not love you.

FORGIVENESS - The subtitle of today's talk is Souvenirs from an Unexpected Detour. My unexpected detour actually began many months before these episodes I've already mentioned. Another souvenir from our journey is forgiveness. I've recently had the opportunity to think a lot about forgiveness. My brother says resentment is like a bond of steel linking you to another person. And that forgiveness is the only way to break that bond. I have lately felt like my plate of people I need to forgive is quite full. On my last birthday I had a special occasion to really get to know and experience forgiveness. My friend Rachael and I had been friends for 13 years before parting ways shortly after my 30th birthday. Our parting was a bitter bitter time for me. I was devastated to say the least. At one point I told my husband that I felt abandoned. To which he responded well basically you have been. This was my first real experience with something very big that needed to be forgiven and I learned first hand at just how real my brother's metaphor about resentment was. I thought about Rachael often and it hurt. I was depressed. I did finally decide it was time to forgive and found that to be an uneasy task. And not really a task at all. It is a process. Here and there I forgave in little bits at a time. And actually each time I thought I was done. Then some time down the road again, that resentment and hurt would rear its ugly head once again. To myself I even expressed that I still loved Rachael even if we never spoke again. I definitely thought I was done then. So on my 36th birthday when I thought of Rachael almost first thing in the morning and wondered if she would think of me on my birthday I was a bit dismayed. Why? Why won't this go away? I thought to myself I have forgiven her over and over again, what does it take? Then I thought or HEARD (you know with that small voice inside you can never really say I thought) I had never forgiven myself for letting go of a friendship that had meant so much to me despite our so-called problems. I got goose bumps and realized it was time to do just that...forgive myself. What more perfect gift could I give myself than to just realize I had done the best that I could at the time and let it go. The next morning at my office I was surprised by a birthday message Rachael had left the night before. Turns out that small voice inside had been urging HER to call ME all day. Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself. To me forgiveness is a state of giving for the sake of peace.

And what you give is compassion. Compassion for yourself or another that basically says I know you were doing the best you could.

Before, I mentioned the letters we have received from so many friends and loved ones that have helped to see us through and I think my gratefulness for these letters is the beginning of bridge to forgiveness as I would probably not have had the opportunity to request such a thing from our friends had it not been for this latest turn in my “unexpected detour”.

ACCEPTANCE – The other day on Facebook I saw a post that said “you never know how strong you are until you have no other choice.” This quote reminds me of my third souvenir to talk about today. Acceptance. When faced with the hardest thing you’ve ever had to deal with just 4 weeks following the hardest thing you’ve ever had to deal with – you have to rely on acceptance even if the situation feels surreal. Many of our friends have been surprised by how we’ve continued to get up and go to work, go to the Y and go out with friends during these trying times. But it truly is the only choice we have. You get up in the morning, you swallow your fears and dreads and you just get going. As Teddy Roosevelt said “ you do what you can, with what you’ve got where you’re at”. That quote to me is the epitome of Acceptance. Of course you could rely on a quote by my friend Andrew Hill, who’s five, “you get what you get and you don’t pitch a fit!”

I’ve also thought a lot about acceptance when it comes to people. Acceptance and love go hand in hand. When we heard, a few weeks after the raid, that we would be on the front page of the paper the next morning we were terrified. We were pretty sure most of the people in this area would just disown us. We were pleasantly surprised (and by that I mean BLOWN AWAY) by the level of acceptance people showed us. People have accepted us even though we may have a shadow of ruin and woe upon us and that kind of acceptance is a gift to cherish every day, not just on the hard days. And it is a gift I am more willing than ever to give to others now.

CHANGE – All great changes are preceded by chaos. Deepak Chopra

Shortly after our news was announced to the public however, we did experience what at the time seemed like some very unpleasant news. Devastating in fact! We returned from lunch one day to a letter from our landlord asking us to leave. WOW – talk about chaos! We'd been in that building for eight years! We thought it really couldn't be a worse time to look around for a new office!

Well MUCH to our surprise a new office came looking for us! Several of our clients are friends with a real estate agent and they said “CALL HER – SHE HAS A SPOT FOR YOU!!!” Well it couldn't have worked out better. We LOVE LOVE LOVE our new office!!! And so do our clients! We keep hearing and we wonder ourselves “Why didn't we do this sooner?”. The new office is so much more us! And it is so much smaller that we had to get rid of a lot of clutter – Very Good, Very Good, YAY!!

Change is good; change is an opportunity to open yourself up to the new, the improved, and the unexpected surprise! Most change brings a bit of serendipitous good with it.

The serendipity for me was that I had actually thought to myself some weeks before these recent turns that I was ready for some outrageous blow the lid off of life changes. Ha ha – think I got them and then some!

So my Ultimate Gift came one day during a walk in the neighborhood. I was thinking about how so many people have surprised me in good and bad ways. And I thought “you can never really know another person unless you live with him”. Then I thought “No, I guess you really can't ever truly know another person, so you can only know yourself”. Then I thought about how I've often been surprised by my own reactions to things and my likes and dislikes. So I think the thing to do is Accept the Changes that come along, be willing to forgive yourself and others and ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS go where the Love is!!! That's my new directive for my Spiritual Journey. Enough said.