

# The Faith of a Trapeze Artist

BY NEAL JONES, MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA



The word “faith” doesn’t occupy the same place of prominence in Unitarian Universalism that it does in some religious traditions. For many of us, faith has become synonymous with blind acceptance of particular religious beliefs, as in: Jesus died for my sins; God created the world in six days; Noah survived a flood in an ark; a talking snake hoodwinked Adam and Eve. For most Unitarian Universalists, indeed for most people who live in the modern world and think with modern understandings, such beliefs are neither intellectually tenable nor morally acceptable. Faith defined as religious belief is what Mark Twain was getting at when he said, “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.”

We UUs feel more comfortable talking about reason and experience than faith, but I want to point out that faith doesn’t have to be contrary to reason and experience. It can be an extension of what we know is so. I think of reason and experience as shining a light on our path. We walk as far as our logic, common sense and past lessons take us, and then we take a step of faith into the darkness.

I am suggesting that faith involves our will and imagination more than our minds. It’s imagining a future that’s different from the past and then living as if that future is possible. By living in the possibilities, faith enables that future to come true. Faith is not believing the unbelievable; it’s trying the untried. I think this understanding of faith accords with the Biblical definition of faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam refer to Abraham as the “father of faith.” He became Father Abraham because God told him to leave his home behind and travel to an unknown land where he would become the father of a great nation. With nothing more than the clothes on his back and a promise, Abraham went, despite the fact that he was 75 and that his wife Sarah’s biological clock had long stopped ticking. Yet, lo and behold, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, they cashed in their Social Security checks for a stroller and a playpen. If you or I became first-time parents between the ages of 90 and 100 we probably wouldn’t think that was a laughing matter. But Abraham and Sarah thought it was so funny that they named their son “Isaac,” which in Hebrew means “laughter.”

I think of Abraham and Sarah as trapeze artists, because living with faith is being willing and able to let go of the old and grab hold of the new. Most fairy tales conclude with “...and they lived happily ever after,” where “happily ever after” implies that you have arrived. But real life is a journey without destinations.

Life is continually challenging us to let go—let go of childhood naiveté, let go of your parents’ way of thinking or your own way of thinking, let go of single life or married life, let go of a job or a vocation, of outdated dreams or outgrown frustrations, of special possessions or special people, and, eventually, to let go of life itself. Sometimes we freely and deliberately let go; sometimes life forces us against our will to let go. But let go we must in order to grab hold of greater life.

The scary part, of course, is when you let go of the old and are in the process of grabbing the new—that in-between state of suspension, that “up-in-the-air” feeling of not having anything secure to hold onto. This is the test of faith—not believing something you know ain’t so, but being willing to live with uncertainty and insecurity until you get to where you’re going.

I don’t have to tell you that any up-in-the-air time between trapeze bars is scary. In response, some hang onto the old bar too long. They avoid the anxiety of the unknown by clinging to the known. They don’t take chances. They play it safe.

# Quest

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Why not go out  
on a limb?  
That’s where  
the fruit is.  
—Will Rogers

A monthly for religious liberals

## SECURITY AND RISK

- FAITH OF A TRAPEZE ARTIST  
*Neal Jones*
- EMBRACING THE DANGEROUS AND SACRED (EXCERPT)  
*Suzi Spangenberg*
- THE RISKS WE TAKE  
*Daniel Gregoire*
- FINDING OUR WAY IN THE WILDERNESS  
*Susan Frederick-Gray*
- INTO THE WILDERNESS  
*Sarah York*
- FROM YOUR MINISTER  
*Meg Riley*
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING  
*Lynn Ungar*
- RISK  
*Anaïs Nin*

They do the same thing the same old way it's always been done. "Better safe than sorry" is their motto.

Poet Janet Rand reminds us, however, of the unavoidable risks inherent in living a full life:

*To live is to risk dying.*

*To hope is to risk despair.*

*To try is to risk failure.*

*But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.*

*The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.*

*He or she may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he or she simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love – live.*

*Only a person who risks is free.*

At the other extreme are people who are too quick to grab the next new thing. They try to avoid the pain of grieving what they have lost by rushing on to the new. They only look forward, not back, and the future is always brighter than today. But unless we allow ourselves to grieve what is left behind, a part of us is left behind. We get stuck in unfinished business. We cannot fully embrace new life until we fully mourn what has died.

There are some things we can do to bolster our faith while moving from the old to the new. One is to nudge ourselves to take reasonable risks. Life is not a smoothly paved, well-marked interstate. It is a winding trail with many curves, potholes, and roadblocks.

To successfully navigate life's journey you have to be willing to take detours off the familiar, well-worn path and try a new way. Whenever you do anything new, from learning to ride a bicycle to having a baby, it's disorienting and scary. You will not have a map or an owner's manual. You will not know exactly where you're going or what you're doing. There are no guaranteed outcomes. You will not have all the answers. You will not feel good for a while. You will feel vulnerable and lost

and anxious before you feel better.

You have to be willing to put yourself in that suspended state before you grab the next trapeze bar. It is an unavoidable part of change.

Another thing we can do to bolster our faith between the bars is to keep before us a dream, a vision of where we're going, a promise of what can be. Victor Frankl, a psychotherapist who was condemned to Auschwitz by the Nazis, writes in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, of the daily deprivation and degradation that marked his existence there. Frankl makes the observation that once a prisoner lost his faith in the future, he was doomed. A hopeless prisoner would either commit suicide or become subject to mental and physical decline and die of "natural causes."

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### Faith is not believing the unbelievable; it's trying the untried.

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Frankl tells of a friend who dreamed that the camp would be liberated on March 30, 1945. The dream filled him with hope until the day drew near and it became apparent that the camp would not be freed. His healthy, hopeful friend suddenly became ill on March 29, became delirious and lost consciousness on March 30, then died on March 31. Frankl also reports that the death rate at Auschwitz was the highest each year between Christmas and New Year's, despite the fact that there was no significant change in the weather, their food supply, or their work conditions. Frankl believed that many prisoners lived in the hope that they would be home for Christmas, and that once they lost that hope, they lost their will to live.

Through his observations at Auschwitz, Frankl became convinced that a person's chances for survival were not the result of environmental conditions

alone, but rather of an inner decision, a fundamental choice between life and death. Frankl came to understand intimately the truth of Nietzsche's statement: "A person who has a why to live for can endure almost any how."

Frankl's reasons for surviving Auschwitz were his longing to be reunited with his wife and his desire to publish a manuscript that the Nazis had destroyed, one which he constantly rewrote in his mind. A vision of the promised land can sustain you while struggling through the wilderness.

One more thing that can bolster your faith when you're suspended between old and new is depending on your friends. When you're going through a transition, don't go it alone. You don't have to. Don't hesitate to lean on your friends. A friend reminds you that you are special: "You are strong enough to get through this"; "You have what it takes"; "You are doing the right thing." A friend also reminds you that you are no different from others: "There's nothing wrong with you"; "Everyone goes through this at some time"; "You are not crazy for feeling this way."

Friends have faith in us when we have lost faith in ourselves. This is where the trapeze metaphor may break down, because I'm not sure you can take a friend with you as you swing from one trapeze bar to the next. But you can have friends in the stands to cheer you on. To depend on your friends doesn't mean that you're weak or needy. It means you're a human being and you're a part of a nurturing, sustaining human community.

There are ways to make those times in the air feel less treacherous, but no way to avoid the swing. Security and risk—the firm grip on the trapeze *and* the terror and exhilaration of letting go—are formed by memory telling us that life will hold us, mingled with imagination assuring us that something new is possible. It is faith that allows us to enjoy the ride. ■

## Embracing the Dangerous and Sacred (Excerpt)

BY SUZI SPANGENBERG, SEMINARIAN,  
STARR KING SCHOOL FOR THE MINISTRY

I have a favorite tree that I like to sit in. Going there is a form of meditation for me. I like to climb up into the branches and look out over the Bay. It is one of my favorite places to sit sipping a cup of coffee while I watch the sun set. The birds fly around me and my cares just melt away. I feel like I am in a sacred and safe world. I love it.

Sacred and safe. There is nothing wrong about sacred and safe spaces. We need them. We need them to balance out the challenges and realities that we face as we work to create a more just and sustainable world. We need sacred and safe spaces. We all do. And it makes sense that we would want to remain in a safe space.

But what happens when we don't leave those safe spaces? What happens when we choose the comfort of the sacred

and safe over the discomfort that often arises when we actively work to counter oppression to create a just and sustainable world?

Indulge me here for a moment. Actually, physically *s-t-r-e-t-c-h*, as far as you can. Feel that? Now, hold it. Take a breath, let it out and *stretch* a little bit further.

Not so much that it hurts. Just so that you feel it. Now, mark that feeling. Really take heed of it. Make sure your body remembers it. Our muscles can become tight and then atrophy with disuse, and so can our spirits. If we don't stretch ourselves we become disconnected from our humanity. Spirit is about breaking open our hearts and minds and embracing all that life holds not just the *safe* and sacred, but also the *dangerous* and sacred.

And by danger, I don't just mean the danger that comes from risking arrest for a cause you feel is just. I also mean



the danger that comes from opening your mind to people, ideas, painful truths, ugly realities and your own prejudices and privilege. Because facing these things *is* dangerous—and probably one of the most sacred things we can do.

Each time we stretch just a little bit, it helps make it easier for the next time. By stretching we can accomplish things we would not have thought possible. We very well may begin to like that feeling of being stretched, and appreciate learning that we are a lot more flexible than we ever thought. We can begin to experience interconnectedness in ways that we could not have imagined. Our capacity for growth is boundless.

So find your sacred and safe space. Go there. Re-charge. Delight in it. But don't reside there. Come out of that space. S-T-R-E-T-C-H yourself. Reach out. Remember that feeling of physically stretching? Reach for that feeling. Embrace the dangerous and sacred. And remember to stretch yourselves a little bit each and every day. ■

## The Risks We Take

BY DANIEL GREGOIRE, DIRECTOR OF  
FAITH DEVELOPMENT, UNITARIAN SOCIETY  
OF GERMANTOWN,  
PENNSYLVANIA

Being alive, truly alive, means taking risks every day.

I live around the corner from my church. One winter Sunday I drove to church because I was bringing a number of props for an intergenerational service. By car, I live about three minutes away.

That morning it snowed, and it kept on snowing, and it snowed some more. As I left the church, I wondered: "Would it be a good idea to leave the car in the lot and walk home?" It



would have been, except for the fact that I chose to wear dress shoes that probably would have been as much help as wearing SPF 50 sunscreen on my feet as I walked through the snow.

So, I found myself driving home in the snow, something I hadn't done until that day. My inexperience showed itself immediately as I slid out of the driveway onto the street, coming just four feet short of the overpass barrier. After that I thought it might be a good idea to drive slower and brake sooner.

It took another series of near misses and some fishtailing before I got my bearings, and then another 15 harrowing minutes before I arrived home.

All this is to say that every day we are presented with choices, and all of those choices involve some level of risk—to self, to others, to the commu-

nity, to the planet, and so on. I had the choice of walking home and risking frostbitten toes or driving home and risking plummeting onto the train tracks. I chose the latter.

But in actuality, it was more than a choice of how to get home; it was a choice of how I would live my life. Am I going to take the most familiar, safest routes or will I open myself to new possibilities and new ways of doing things? Such untrodden paths might challenge me, reveal my inexperience, my biases, and expose the soft underbelly of my vulnerable, human self. But I think I might get a bit wiser in the process.

I encourage you to take risks every day. Risk loving, risk hoping, risk being courageous or spontaneous. Risk living. ■

## Finding Our Way in the Wilderness

BY SUSAN FREDERICK-GRAY,  
MINISTER, UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION  
OF PHOENIX, ARIZONA



*Once upon a time there was a child made all of salt. This child very much wanted to know who he was and where he came from. So he set out on a long journey, traveling many lands in pursuit of this understanding. Finally he came to the shores of the great ocean.*

*“How marvelous,” he cried. “How beautiful!” And he stuck one foot in the water. But then he saw how his toe disappeared and he became afraid. The ocean beckoned him in further, saying: “If you wish to know who you are, do not be afraid.” The salt child walked further and further into the water, dissolving with each step, and at the end, exclaimed, “Ah, now I know who I am.”*

On May 29, 2010, the Rev. Peter Morales, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, stood in our pulpit in Phoenix and said that the greatest challenge for our congregations was to find a way to create a new culture with a multiracial, multicultural spirit that could celebrate the growing diversity of our communities. Such a culture would speak to the realities of our children—who are increasingly identifying as multiracial—and be authentic to the message of our Universalist faith, which declares, in the words of UU theologian Paul Rasor: “Humanity—indeed all of creation—is ultimately united in a common destiny.”

President Morales’s charge got some of our leaders thinking and working. Jimmy Leung, the vice president of my congregation’s board, began talking to other Unitarian Universalist ministers and lay people about multiculturalism within our denomination. In what reminded me of the story of the salt

child, Jimmy wrote in an email, “I feel like I am toe deep in an ocean that needs to be crossed.”

And being toe deep, I felt like the salt child felt—afraid. Have you ever come to a place in life, like the story describes, where you don’t know who you are, in which you have lost the surety of where you’ve come from and maybe you’re not even sure where you belong?

In the reading on the next page, Sarah York writes, “Wilderness is a part of every person’s soul-journey.” And when we are in the wilderness, “we are neither where we have been nor where we are going.” It is a middle place.

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### “Wilderness is a part of every person’s soul-journey.”

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Ever since I was a child, I wanted to work in math and the sciences. Engineering was my dream, then biology. But by college, I knew I was on the wrong path. I went through a time of being lost. For as long as I could remember I had a path, a plan in front of me, and then all of a sudden, my heart and my passion weren’t there anymore. And the most difficult part was that I didn’t know where I was going. It was several years before I felt the call to ministry—so there was a long period of feeling lost, afraid, even depressed.

Maybe you have your own story of going through a big life change, a major loss, a crisis of faith, in which suddenly the things you long took for granted about yourself and how you defined yourself seemed to evaporate. Familiar roles and qualities, like husband, wife, good son, active, healthy, provider, successful, home owner—any and all can be changed by life circumstances, sometimes by choice and sometimes without our consent. And we often don’t just suddenly find new definitions, either; it’s rarely that easy.

There is a period of real struggle, grief—even destructiveness—as we journey into the “boundless territory of the soul” to discover our grounding, who we are, and the new path ahead. We make mistakes in the wilderness. And anyone who has been there would attest to Sarah York’s description of it as a place where “there is danger and possibility, risk and promise.” But these times of being in the wilderness are also times of renewal and transformation, even if it does not feel that way when you’re in the middle of it.

And the wilderness experience is not only individual. “Wilderness is a part of every person’s soul-journey, and part of our journey together as human beings who seek to live in community,” York reminds us.

Who would have guessed in 2010 that our Phoenix congregation would be called on to be allies in the streets, to take a major role in the Association on behalf of human rights and equality? But we chose to enter the wilderness. We are trying to learn how to live into this call. We’re trying to figure out how to be a public congregation, and the leadership of the congregation is feeling a call to take intentional steps towards being a multiracial, multi-cultural congregation.

I have a confession to make. Just making this commitment fills me with fear. Genuine fear. I feel like that salt child. We are all salt children, and when we step into that ocean, when we realize that who we are—our source, where we come from—is all one, the experience can be overwhelming. Society, civilization, colonization, geography, opportunity, poverty—all these things separate us in this world. They separate us by creating borderlands between peoples: sometimes a vast gulf of differences in experiences, language, interpretations, communication, and meaning—all the things that make up different cultures. But when we search for truth, when we look for the essence of life, when we *(continued on page 5)*

## Into the Wilderness

BY REV. SARAH YORK, SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA



When Jesus was baptized the spirit descended upon him like a dove and God said, “This is my son, in whom I am well

pleased.” It must have been a great feeling, but it didn’t last long. The next thing Jesus knew, the nice spirit that had descended like a dove became aggressive and drove him into the wilderness. There he spent forty days of deprivation, self-examination, and confrontation with the devil.

This was no Sierra Club hike through the Qumran National Forest. He suffered; he struggled; he was tested.

Jesus’ solitary struggles to remain true to his covenant and calling echo those of his ancestors, who spent forty years in the wilderness establishing a religious community.

Wilderness is a part of every person’s soul-journey, and part of our journey together as human beings who seek to live in community. Time in the wilderness is always a time of struggle. It is also a time of transformation and renewal. In traditional terms, it is a time of purification. The journey into wilderness reminds us that we are alone and not alone. We are neither where we have been nor where we are going. There is danger and possibility; risk and promise.

In the wilderness, the spirit may descend like a dove and lift us on its

wings of hope, then drive us into the depths of despair; it may affirm us with a gift of grace, then challenge us to change. In the stories and rituals of Eastern as well as Western religions, a journey into the wilderness represents a time when we both pursue and resist the Holy.

We may choose to enter the wilderness like the people of Yahweh, to escape bondage, or like Henry David Thoreau, to “live deliberately.” Or we may, like Jesus, be driven there without much choice. Once there, even our markers of time and space collapse, for this wilderness is not in space or time, but is the boundless territory of the soul. ■

*From Into the Wilderness, published in 2000 by Apollo Ranch Press.*

*(Finding Our Way continued from page 4)* look to the foundation of our Universalist theology, it tells us that we are all bound together, part of one creation—wrapped, as Dr. King described it, in a “single garment of destiny.” My fear is an acknowledgment that on this journey we will certainly make mistakes. I have already made plenty. After all, when the Jews were in the wilderness, and Moses went up on the mountaintop to meet with God, the rest of the people quickly began building false idols, following the wrong things.

I also fear the possibility that when we put our toe in the water, when we see it disappear, we will pull back and not venture further. Because change always means losing something. Making room to be more inclusive means letting go of some more stubborn aspects of a given culture. It means making room to be changed. But change can also bring new promise and possibility—something better than the past.

But probably more than any of this, my fear lies in knowing the depth of

the truth that lies in that ocean...then reaching for it...and failing. Creating a truly multicultural religious community is not easy. Of all religious congregations of any faith in the United States, only 5% are multiracial, multicultural. What pastors leading these congregations say about the work is that it is exceedingly rare, incredibly difficult, and absolutely worth it.

It requires the ongoing work of being radically hospitable and radically inclusive, of being willing to always learn, to take risks with one another, to tell one another honestly but lovingly when we have been offended. It requires learning to open our hearts, our minds and our spirits wider.

It is, in short, a big risk. And if you have experienced the wilderness because of a choice you made—a time when you let go, walked away or made a change from what you knew in order to reach for the unknown—then you probably know the fear that comes with such a risk. Once in the wilderness, it is easy to wonder if you made the right choice. After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt it was not long

before they wanted to go back into slavery, rather than continuing to live on the edge, in uncertainty, wandering in the wilderness.

When we take risks and step into the unknown we take a chance at losing, at failure. Is it better not to risk? It can’t be. Because without risk, we would not know love. Without risk, we could not change. Without risk, we would never make it to the ocean, never find out who we truly are and what really matters. Without risk, we might never ask the question. And so this risk is worth it—fear and all.

And once the risk is taken, then the work begins. The work of finding one’s way through the wilderness, of practicing forgiveness and mercy toward ourselves and one another when we make mistakes, when we say the wrong thing and fall short. It means being intentional about the journey. It means walking forward into that ocean even as you see old assumptions about your world and your life dissolving. It means heading straight into the heart of letting go into who we most truly are. ■



## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

When I was a kid, my father had a reason why just about everything my siblings and I might do was risky and might ultimately lead to death, or at least dismemberment. He often provided cautionary tales about people who had injured themselves or died, invoking names we'd never heard of as if he was mourning them still.

Pop a pimple? Toddy Mackil's grandfather knew someone who died that way. Thought it was a pimple, burst a blood vessel, and WOOP, dead in minutes.

Light a candle? No way. Countless numbers of fires had started that way; didn't we read the paper? And what's wrong with lights, anyway? Aren't we grateful to Thomas Edison? My poor mother, who kept trying until she died, resigned herself to yet another night with a beautifully set table, unlit candles in its center, our faces blazing under the overhead light.

My father hated the annual Christmas candlelight service at our church, and when the church added candles for people to light silently for joys and sorrows, he could barely contain his horror.

Even Christmas trees were suspect. If we were going to plug it in, we needed to be sitting right by it. What do you mean you went to the bathroom? Don't you know how quickly electric fires can start?

And forget the chemistry set I wanted so badly, which would inevitably lead to blindness or third-degree burns. (It didn't help my cause when my older sister accidentally set her dress on fire in high school chemistry. See? Just goes to show. ) After a while, we didn't even ask about fireworks. Sparklers and snakes were just as contraband as giant rockets.

So it became that things that were legitimately dangerous, like, say, sticking a fork in the toaster to get your toast out, became occasion for our eye-rolling. Linda Osborn's father may or may not have lost both legs by changing a tire with his legs under the car and having it roll over him. Whether he did or didn't, my father taught us how to do it right, but rather than thank him, we ridiculed him behind his back.

When I got out on my own, it is probably no surprise that I was drawn to risk. I would pretty much try anything anyone suggested, or that I could imagine. I hitch-hiked to the mountains, to the ocean, across town—by myself if no one else wanted to go. A daring girlfriend and I hopped freights, took long hitch-hiking trips, “air hitched”—went to small airports and looked for pilots going someplace interesting who could use a little extra weight in the back of the plane. My friend had grown up in Saudi Arabia, where my father's control paled in comparison to things she wasn't allowed to do. The two of us were testing our limits, declaring our independence, acting as if, in fact, nothing was dangerous.

It wasn't until years later, when I was training to be a counselor at a rape hotline, that the danger I had put myself in became clear to me. I remember shaking with terror, sitting in a safe room, as I looked back and considered—for the first time really—how vulnerable I had made myself.

Of course, we're all vulnerable, all the time, some of us much more than others, depending on our gender, race, class, and all kinds of other things. As I've aged, and especially as I became a parent myself, I've realized the truth of my father's instincts—danger does come quickly, and usually surprisingly, and it is pretty much a miracle that any of us makes it to adulthood.

When my father died, his church dedicated a kiosk to him and my mother, honoring their lifelong commitment and generosity. My younger brother, who lives nearby, went to the church service where this transpired.

He emailed us later:

*I forgot to mention one of the more interesting things about the service yesterday. First off, it was apparently a record setting day for candle-lighting on the make-a-wish cart. Robin and I went up toward the end of the line, and that cart was almost entirely full of candles and putting off some real heat by the time we got up to it. Then, as part of the service we all were instructed to spend a few minutes and think about what was most important to us. And then invited to share with the congregation. Then we were all invited to write our secret word on a strip of colored paper, come to the front of the church and link it onto some existing links, forming a tapestry of importance. Well there was quite a line- up to get to the pulpit area, and a lot of talking as people waited in line, and wouldn't you know it, somebody caught fire on the candle cart. Not a bad fire, just a shawl started to burn, but there were some flames, and the people around the lady were smacking her on the butt to put it out. No injuries, and just a couple of burns on the carpet at the front of the church.*

I'm sorry, Dad, that I find this story so funny. I'm sure a lady lit on fire by candles in church is not the memorial you would have chosen. But what a fitting reminder that we are surrounded by risk—and by the security of those who help us to get through it, even if it means smacking us on the butt. ■



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## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR,  
MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING,  
CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



What's the riskiest thing you've ever done? Jump out of a plane? Travel to a foreign country? Ride a bike downhill with no hands? Change jobs? Make friends with a stranger? Swing upside down on the monkey bars? Tell someone you love them?

Life is full of things that feel risky, and of course what feels dangerous to one person might feel totally ordinary to another. You might feel completely at ease up in a hang glider, but terrified to talk in front of a crowd. Or you might be petrified at the thought of going into a dark cave, but perfectly comfortable climbing to the top of a tall tree.

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The deepest security,  
the one that can carry us  
through all the chosen and  
unchosen risks of life,  
is that we are a part of  
something much larger  
than ourselves....

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Luckily, most of the time we're able to make choices about what risks we're willing to take. We can weigh the options, and decide whether it's worth it to go someplace where we don't speak the language or if we want to take the big jump off the high dive. Everybody needs some level of excitement and the thrill that comes with pushing your boundaries and trying something new. But everyone also needs to feel safe, like they have some measure of control over their lives. And each person has a different point at which life feels exciting, but basically safe. For some people, just walking out of the door in the morning feels riskier than they would like.

That's where it gets tricky. It's a lot more pleasant when we get to decide what risks we want to take and what feels like too much. But lots of times we have to do things that feel risky and uncomfortable without getting any say in the matter. If your family moves across the country—or even to a different country—you're going to have to go to a new school and find a new set of friends whether you're happy with taking that risk or not. If you've been married for 50 years and your spouse dies, you don't get a choice whether to take on learning how to live life in a whole new way. Companies often have people who are in charge of "risk management," but the truth is that sometimes you get to manage your risks and sometimes you don't.

In those times when you don't get to manage your risks, the only thing you can do, other than to just keep trudging forward, is to lean in towards the things that make you feel secure and at home. You may have to make new friends in a new place, but you probably can still call or text or Skype your old friends. You may have to learn how to do your own taxes for the first time, but there probably are friends or professionals who can help you. And there will probably also be times when no one else can get you through the risk you need to take, when you need to find a deep security inside yourself.

I know that's easier to say than to do. And I know it's easier to find security inside yourself if all your life you've had people around that you could count on, who taught you that the world was basically a safe place. But at some point each and every person is going to have to learn to act from a place of trust inside. Now, I'm not someone who goes in for sayings like "Everything happens for a reason," or "God never gives you more than you can handle." Sure, everything happens for a reason, but sometimes it's a really terrible reason, like people being greedy and cruel.

And often things happen for reasons like gravity or genetics, which are not bad in themselves, but can produce

When Jude stumbled upon the CLF she couldn't wait to see what our progressive spiritual tradition was all about. At that point, she said: *Little did I know how important the CLF would become in my life. Death and loss recently visited, and the CLF is what has carried me spiritually. The complexities and emotions of living, dying and loss require soul searching and inspiration. Thank whatever God exists that the CLF exists!*

Your love, kindness and yes, financial support embody this church in a world filled with indifference and judgment. Your gifts build a nurturing haven for people who would otherwise be, or feel, alone. Help ensure that this welcoming community continues to flourish. Make a monthly commitment today by using the enclosed envelope or visiting us online at [www.clfuu.org](http://www.clfuu.org). ■

some truly awful results. I can't believe that God would be out torturing strong people by giving them extra burdens to bear, and I'm pretty sure that people get more than they can handle all the time, but they do their best to get through it, because what other choice do they have?

So I'm not saying that you should trust in the universe because everything is guaranteed to come out right in the end. I'm saying that you should trust in the universe, and in yourself, because you belong, because in this interconnected web of life you are never alone, because in this interconnected web of life what you do and how you do it matters in ways that you may never see.

I'm saying that the deepest security, the one that can carry us through all the chosen and unchosen risks of life, is that we are a part of something much larger than ourselves—not something that guarantees that we will be safe, but something that guarantees that we matter. ■



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That we're moving? The new CLF address will be 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210-1409. You can continue to find us online at CLFuu.org and QuestForMeaning.org.

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## Risk

And then the day came,  
when the risk  
to remain tight  
in a bud  
was more painful  
than the risk  
it took  
to Blossom



*Attributed to Anaïs Nin*





