

# Faith in the Borderland

BY ABHI JANAMANCHI, SENIOR MINISTER, CEDAR LANE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, BETHESDA, MARYLAND

*I love Abhi's language about the "hyphenated space between perspectives." It really speaks to me and gives me hope for a more accepting and just world.—LD*



# Quest

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In a review of a *Star Trek* movie, eleventh in the series of epic films, Natalia Anatova, editor of *Global Comment* writes:

*There is something particularly eerie and vulnerable about . . . the threshold of exploration . . . : [where] a human body is suspended in space, graceful and horrible, seconds after being ripped from the safety of its ship.*

For most of my life I have inhabited two worlds like a human hyphen in that final frontier of faith, suspended outside the safety of my ship.

Growing up in India, I felt like a social outcast, a cultural hyphen, a religious hybrid: an only child of a short-lived marriage between a lower-caste Muslim father and an upper-caste Hindu mother. So it was for me, being raised by my mother and maternal grandfather who became my surrogate father, learning a language and culture different from my own, hailing from a working class family, and yet having the audacity to fall in love and marry a girl from a traditional Hindu family.

Despite my best efforts to blend in—I became a devout Hindu, prayed to various deities, went to the temple regularly, and even wore a sacred mark on my forehead to prove my credentials—I felt isolated from a society that seemed hostile to the values I held dear.

After my beloved and I married, we felt drawn to the Brahmo Samaj, a Unitarian-Hindu religion. That association led me to the International Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom in Bangalore, where I met, among other Unitarian Universalists, Spencer Lavan, then Dean of Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago. Spencer saw something in me that I had not seen in myself and encouraged me to study for the ministry. I took a leap of faith, leaving behind for a time my wife and infant son and my native land.

In the U.S. I felt like a visitor from outer space. I did not know where I fit as a Hindu-Muslim-Indian with a physics degree and a banking career, studying to be a minister in an unfamiliar faith. I did not really belong in the local Indian community either, as my calling put me at odds with all the doctors, engineers, IT professionals, and motel owners. My vocation is still a conversation-stopper each time I am asked by a fellow Indian: "So, what do you do for a living?"

In the anonymity of Chicago, I wanted to belong—as a natural part of the human landscape, not an aberration to be tolerated. I wanted to be comfortable in the presence of others and know they were comfortable in mine. I did not want to be caught upside down and alone in the fault lines between worlds, cultures, and faiths. And then the late Reverend Frank Robertson, then minister of religious education at the Unitarian Church of Evanston, invited me to his church. Frank gave me the incredible gift of seeing myself as more than just the sum of my identities. He showed me what Unitarian Universalism was all about: a faith open and welcoming to people regardless of ethnicity, theology, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or political affiliation; a faith where theological crossbreeds, cultural mutts, religious hybrids like you and me can struggle and connect in the hyphenated space between perspectives; a faith where being a mutt or a mongrel is not an awful place of last resort but an intentional first choice. Instead of promis-

## In honor of Lorraine Dennis's 15 years as Executive Director of the CLF, we asked her to

choose some favorite pieces to share with us before she retires at the end of the summer.



This issue, then, is a special "Lorraine's Choice" edition.

## A monthly for religious liberals

### LORRAINE'S CHOICE

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- OUR RELIGION  
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ing a heaven of sameness, Frank invited me into a community of individuals working at creating a heaven on earth.

I have been telling my own story to point out some of the reasons people might have for joining a Unitarian Universalist church. People join:

- to be part of a sanctuary;
- to affirm a personal identity and be accepted for who we are, as we are;
- to prevent our children from being, as the Reverend John Wolf said, “saddled with guilt or terrified of some celestial peeping Tom;”
- to be in a religion that is this-worldly, concerned more about life before death;
- to be part of a religion that calls no one a sinner, yet is deeply aware of struggle for wholeness within the human heart;
- to live in a way that says, “You need not think alike to love alike...,” for love has no boundaries or barriers.

Not that Unitarian Universalism is the religious equivalent of the Humane Society. That sounds more like a temporary shelter than a life-long haven. Our faith is not a comfy homestead either. Many of us struggle to belong in this faith—as people of color and from minority cultures, as differently-abled people, as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning people, as Christian theists, pagans, atheists, secular humanists, Hindus, Buddhists, or as Republicans.

It is particularly a struggle for those of us who are people of color or from minority cultures because it is difficult to feel nourished by an aspiration rather than a reality. Many of us find ourselves feeling a deep commitment to the promise of this faith while coming to terms with the frustration about our current reality as a predominantly Euro-American movement.

Yet, we stay. We keep showing up. Why? Because we know we are not alone. Somehow we know that we

belong here, and that the struggle to belong is an integral part of belonging.

I have stuck it out, even through doubt and ambivalence, because Unitarian Universalism is the way I want to live my life. My Unitarian Universalism lets me practice my Hindu faith; it helps me be a better Hindu, a better human being. I stay because Unitarian Universalism has a healing message for a broken world yearning for reconciliation and wholeness.

I stay because Unitarian Universalism is committed to working through race and class, heterosexism and ableism,

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### Unitarian Universalism has a healing message for a broken world. . .

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sexism and nativism, though we have much to learn and far to go.

I stay to celebrate my multi-hyphenated identity not so much as an American melting pot but rather a South Indian *thali*—a selection of tasty dishes in different bowls presented on a single plate. Each dish tastes different, and does not necessarily mix with the next. But they belong together on the same plate because they complement each other in making the meal a satisfying repast.

I stay to find the strength to live honestly among the various interstices of my life; to take responsibility for the ambiguities of my pluralistic identity while seeking common ground with others. But trying to live a life affirming a plurality of identities can be a counter-cultural process. Our culture tends to prefer its citizens to be pure racial types and monolingual people who can be categorized easily as citizen or alien, friend or foe, elect or damned, patriot or terrorist. It often seems to label people as one of us or

one of them—no hyphens allowed.

But labels tend to suck the life-force out of society. In seeking a utopian future, people live partly in an imaginary world, dissociated from the fullness of being that eludes them. With no tolerance for the hyphens, humans leave behind too much destruction and express too little love. They create an ethnocentric morality that obliges them to take care only of their own, without providing a place for those on the margins. Ultimately, they create sacred societies instead of holy communities.

Dr. Darrell Fasching, a Professor of Religion at the University of South Florida, describes the difference between the two:

*In a sacred society, all who are the same, fitting the description of an ideal type, are considered human and all who are different, all who are aliens and strangers, are taken to be less than human.*

*In contrast, a holy community is founded on the hospitality to the very strangers that a sacred society rejects. (It has) no sacred center . . . because its center and sense of identity lies outside itself—in the stranger.*

The center of Unitarian Universalism lies outside of itself, in the stranger, in difference rather than in similarity. In our faith, the margins hold the center.

We are called to create holy communities where strangers are not only welcome but where all are enjoined to do the work of healing and transformation by wrestling with the strangers within themselves.

In Genesis, an important struggle yielded not a curse, but a blessing: “The whole world spoke the same language using the same words.” But when the people built a tower “with its top in the sky, the Lord confused their speech and scattered them all over the earth, so that not one understood the other.” Babel gave us the gift of diversity: a world of strangers called to be in right



relationship with one another, striving with humility and compassion to learn one another's new languages and to create holy communities.

The hope of peaceful co-existence lies in recognizing many kinds of hyphens that express our diverse affiliations as common inhabitants of a wide world, sort of like the cosmic crew of the Starship Enterprise. We are not just passengers, cloistered in cabins on this spaceship earth. As Herbert "Marshall" McLuhan has said, "We are all crew."



I believe that we are boldly going where no faith has gone before. Despite all the travail, economic uncertainty, and various other crises

that threaten to engulf us, we are present at this sacred moment when new life is about to emerge from the womb of the past. What now begins to breathe can become our shared future of mutual openness to accepting others in all their differentness while affirming our common humanity.

Will we recognize the mystery of this possibility? Will we be open to its opportunities to construct a more compassionate, sustainable, and interdependent way of being in relationship with one another and the planet? Do we dare to aspire to a higher level for humanity? Are we willing to let it be beamed up into the light of tomorrow? These are not questions. They are the agendas of today. They are the exciting, irresistible invitations to each of us to abandon prejudice and stubborn refusals to hear one another more deeply. They are the program and the means for people like you and me who struggle for justice and reconciliation, who are willing to sacrifice to attain a more just and equitable economic order, and who dream of a new global society based on cooperation and peace.

If we join our dreams with the dreams of so many other people, real change is possible; it is the task of our faith to link those dreams and make them a reality. ■

*In this homily from the CLF worship at the UUA General Assembly in 2009, Jane writes a primer on Unitarian Universalism, with my favorite message that beauty and fun are really important to UUs.—LD*



## Our Religion

BY JANE RZEPKA, MINISTER EMERITA, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I'm not sure I've ever preached about religion, exactly, which makes me wonder how I've been able to draw a paycheck as a minister for all these years. But I had a hankering to preach about religion this morning, what with our worship service placed at the beginning of a General Assembly that includes both an election and a rethinking of our principles and purposes. What a perfect time to step back and talk about what it is we Unitarian Universalists are doing—or trying to do—when we get together to gather the spirit and harvest the power.

In the anthem the choir just performed, poet Adrienne Rich tells us that her heart is moved by all she cannot save. And yes, as Unitarian Universalists, we feel that same pain, knowing that some people live lives of misery, devoid of respect or justice. That's why we promote human dignity and worth 'til we're blue in the face. But promoting dignity and worth, as it turns out, is not enough. As part of our religion, we also recognize our ability to reconstitute the world, to know and share beauty, to promote the pleasures of living life. Two inclinations then, two values, that we bring together in one religion: human dignity and worth and the beauty and joy—the fun—of life.

But really, what's the big deal—are Unitarian Universalists that unique? I'm so aware that we're sitting here in Salt Lake City, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints are all around us, every bit as eager to claim dignity and worth,

beauty and joy, as their own values.

Now I have to tell you that Joseph Smith, a Mormon prophet, lived in my little hometown in Ohio for a time in the 1830s—his old house was right down the street from our school. Joseph Smith and I are practically on a first name basis. If you grow up in Kirtland, you know the house where Joseph and Emma lived, that he had Egyptian mummies in there, that he saw what would be the new Kirtland temple in a vision, and that they built it with stone from down the hill in the quarry. You know that Jesus Christ appeared in and around the temple dedication, along with Moses and Elijah. After school you can run your hands along the old hewn timbers in the temple. You know about the embezzling that happened over at the bank, that Joseph Smith hot-footed it out of town, and you know that once upon a time, Joseph Smith got tarred and feathered.

You also know, if you grow up in an almost completely Mormon town, that dignity and worth is a Mormon value, and that the way you achieve that sense of dignity and worth is to forsake all evil, and dedicate yourself to the gospel under the authority of divine priesthood. The Savior Himself is in charge of it. There is no other way.

But my family was Unitarian, and that's not the way dignity and worth happened for me at all.

When I was a little girl, I got really sick. It wasn't unusual to get polio in those days. That's what I got. Maybe others of you of a certain age had it too, or you remember those who did.

Even though I was four years old and thought of myself as a big girl, I spent my hospital ward days in a metal crib that had tall metal bars on the sides. Everyone who approached wore a mask and gown, and so it was a world of eyes and eyebrows and muffled voices. The unit was an isolation ward, so the curtains remained drawn around

my crib and the masked people mostly stayed away. If one of them showed up, even if they brought a carton of chocolate milk and a flex straw, I knew that they were going to do something that hurt. It was always part of the bargain, and there would be no

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**For us dignity and worth is about grounding and confidence and the sure knowledge that you're somebody.**

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crying. When there were toys from home—paper dolls, teddy bears—that's what I remember, the nurses needed to destroy them, to burn them, right after I played with them because of the germs. In that time and place, to have polio was a stern invitation to buck up.

As a Unitarian kid, before I was five, I had developed a rich interior life as an existentialist.

But then, on one ordinary day, my dad showed up at the hospital. I was going home to my brothers and sisters and to my mom and dad. Mom had packed a little bag, and they dressed me up—I can still see it—the white blouse and plaid skirt with straps, and of course the dainty white socks and shiny Mary Jane shoes. Someone opened the curtains, the side of the crib came down, and it was time to go.

It was time to walk. I remember how long the hallway looked, shiny linoleum stretching and stretching and stretching toward the double doors, to the Buick in the parking lot. The grown-ups were talking, probably making last-minute arrangements, and I was on my own beside them, step, step, step. Tap, tap, tap in those Mary Jane's. The walking was pretty hard work, I remember. And this is what went through my four-year-old mind: "Here I am, walking down the hall." People seem to think I'm a normal

person who can just put one foot in front of the other. "Here *I* am, walking down the hall." "Here *I am*, walking down the hall."

That, my friends, is what dignity and worth looks like. At least it is for me. Head held high, believing you have what it takes to be a human being. For Unitarian Universalists it's not about forsaking evil, it's not about the Latter Day Saints' saving principles or priestly authority—that system works great for some people, but it's not our way. For us dignity and worth is about grounding and confidence and the sure knowledge that you're *somebody*. You're somebody, and you are walking down the hall. If we were in charge of the universe, everyone on this planet would know what that feels like.

When we hear during General Assembly that we are working for justice, fundamentally, that's what we're working for. Dignity. Worth. The recognition that each person is a human being. You, yourself. And everyone else. Reflected in equal rights, fair wages, medical care, housing and freedom. Because, as Adrienne Rich says:

*My heart is moved by all I cannot save:*

*so much has been destroyed*

*I have to cast my lot with those who age after age, perversely,*

*with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.*

But there's more to reconstituting the world than enabling dignity and worth. And there's more to dignity and worth than, well, dignity and worth—more than head-held-high walking down the hall. You have to have the beauty, the fun. And religion understands that. For most of us, there is something about beauty, broadly defined, that sustains us, enlivens us, that gives us joy that helps us know who we are.

When I'm thinking along these lines, my mind always turns to this stern British matron whom I met on the beach one day—she was heavy-set,

properly dressed, sixty-ish. We struck up a conversation.

We talked about this and that, and before long, somehow she wandered into a saga about her dental history. So I closed the book I was reading; I could tell I was in this for the long haul.

"Bridge work," she said. I don't know what that is exactly, but she'd had a lot of it, and it kept popping out, or falling apart, or getting bent, or whatever bridge work does when it goes awry. Though I consider myself a trained professional (in listening, not dentistry), keeping on top of this conversation was getting to be pretty hard work, at least for beach duty.

But then she revived my attention by saying, "It's the snorkeling that does it. My dentist told me that I have to give it up." Her face changed then, and her voice, and she looked at me and said, "*But it is my fondest pleasure.*"

With that, she stripped down to her swim suit, put on her white bathing cap, carefully fastening the strap under her chin, grabbed her snorkel and fins, and headed out to the glories of the coral and parrot fish and conchs. Near as I could tell, she had instantaneously morphed from this stern matron into the zestiest person alive.

There she was, heading for the water, head held high, having some fun. There she was, heading for the water—grounded, confident. There she was, headed for the water, immersed in the pleasure and the beauty of it all.

Friends, there we have it, dignity and worth and the affirmation of living in the world's beauty. The Rev. Patrick O'Neill looks at it this way. He says:

*Don't talk to me about how we all become worthy and dignified after we accept Jesus Christ into our lives, or after we confess our sins and imperfections...; I don't come to church to hear about all the ways in which our imperfect humanity should be condemned; I come to church for affirmation. I come to church in praise of*

*Continued on page 5*



*I find Kim's words about friendship, excerpted from a sermon of hers we printed in the February 2011 Quest, very helpful as a roadmap to a meaningful life. My friends as chosen family and my family as chosen friends.—LD*

## Friend

BY **KIM K. CRAWFORD HARVIE**,  
SENIOR MINISTER, ARLINGTON STREET  
CHURCH, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Friend: the one who sees the beauty,  
even in the brokenness,  
and reflects that to us, like a mirror.

Friend: devotion.

Friend: the one who comes and sits  
and remains with us,  
even in the face of terrible brokenness,  
and helps us to bear it.

Friend: the one who makes the world  
a little safer,

the one who carries us when we can't,  
the one who makes us smile.

Friend: to look on all people

as all our relations:

to forgive,

to bear hope,

and to work together

for a world at peace,

a world in love. ■

*Continued from page 4.*

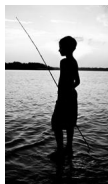
*the gift of life.... This is the starting  
point in the Liberal Church,*

*and it is the point to which we must  
ever call ourselves if our mission is  
to be true.*

Isn't that our religion? Whatever it is  
that opens us up to our own human  
worth and the majesty around us?  
Isn't that our religion? Dignity for  
everyone and the chance to know a  
larger beauty? Isn't that religion?  
Whatever it is that propels us to  
reconstitute the world?

May we live our religion, in all that is  
our lives. ■

*I always feel something when I  
read Lynn's poems. "Building the  
structure of joy" seems like such a  
good aspiration to take into  
retirement.—LD*



## Joy

BY **LYNN UNGAR**, CLF  
MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN  
LEARNING

To each their own pleasure:  
backpacking above the tree line  
where the air starts to thin;  
dancing 'til dawn, even after the  
blisters rise;  
movie marathons or the real thing,  
mile upon mile upon mile.  
You know the way the world lights  
up:

The pure pleasure of the perfect  
chord  
or the perfect shot,  
the bowling strike and the baseball  
no-hitter,  
the hole in one and the standing O,  
the rare moments of perfection  
when everything aligns  
and you are suddenly illuminated,  
incandescent with joy.

Perhaps it matters to no one but  
you.

Certainly your neighbors can't  
understand

why you would rise at dawn  
to seek that elusive lightning.

But isn't there something to be said  
for building the structure of joy?

Aren't we all somehow blessed by  
those

who choose the discipline  
of their peculiar pleasures?

Doesn't that light  
somehow brighten us all? ■

This is a  
bittersweet  
time for the  
CLF as we  
bid  
farewell to  
Executive



Director Lorraine Dennis, who will  
retire in August. We feel both grati-  
tude and sadness as we thank Lor-  
raine for her 15 years of service.  
But as we know  
all too well at the CLF, change is  
the only constant in life!

In the spirit of ending well, and to  
honor new beginnings, please con-  
sider a gift of \$100 in recognition  
of Lorraine's many gifts to the  
CLF. ■

*I just love this poem. I get a little slide  
show in my mind and so  
appreciate the idea that this very  
simple thing—water—is so darn  
complicated.—LD*

## Be Like Water

BY **KENDRA FORD**, MINISTER,  
FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
SOCIETY OF EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

run deep run clear  
fill any space to its  
own dimensions  
respond to the moon, to gravity  
change colors with the light  
hold your temperature longer  
than the surrounding air  
take the coast by storm  
go under ground  
bend light  
be the one thing people need, even  
when they're fasting  
eat boulders, quietly  
be a universal solvent  
■



## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I am not happy to be writing this column to honor and celebrate Lorraine Dennis. No, I'm not happy at all, because underneath the honoring and the celebrating is the letting go. I hate goodbyes. I stay in denial about them right up until the last minute. Oh, of course on some level I know Lorraine is leaving. We've been going through a year of "last times" together—the last budget she'll put together, the last GA to plan and deliver, the last board meeting. I know Lorraine is leaving. I've written a job description and interviewed people to find another executive director for the CLF, for God's sake. By the time you read this, I'm confident we'll have selected someone. But still...just don't make me say goodbye!

I hate goodbyes and yet life is chock full of them. The garden is a long series of hellos and goodbyes as flowers and vegetables grow in their seasons. The plants are great models at knowing when to let go. People are also saying goodbye everywhere you look. Sometimes morosely, sometimes breezily, sometimes thoughtfully and with care. The hardest goodbyes, of course, are the unplanned ones—the times when there is no time for closure, when shock and grief are balled up in one and it's hard to catch your breath, much less think a coherent thought.

But no matter how well-planned, how slowly or quickly completed, goodbyes are hard. We comfort ourselves with memories. We comfort ourselves by telling ourselves and each other stories about what we have said goodbye to, looking at pictures, remembering.

So here are some memories of Lorraine, observations about all that she

has brought to the CLF. If you have memories of your own you want to share, I urge you to drop Lorraine a note or an email. Beneath her excitement about getting to travel when and where she wants with her husband, getting to sleep in and choose precisely what she wants to do with her days, I suspect she is also grieving. Your memories will help her to savor her time with the CLF, just as we savor our time with her.

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### *No one has a bigger heart than Lorraine.*

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Lorraine came to the CLF in 2000. She was brought on board by our Minister Emerita, Jane Rzepka, who writes:

*When we hired Lorraine Dennis to serve as the CLF's first executive director, we were thinking, "Wow! She can run a YMCA, and build a new one. She can burst into song. She can figure out any and all software. She can drive a school bus. Guileless, is what she is. She knows every aspect of a congregation. She can make grape jam. Build a budget. Whistle. Say just the right thing to a floundering staff member. Write grants. Inspire trust and enthusiasm. Make you laugh every day. And no one has a bigger heart than Lorraine."*

*She said it was our mission that drew her in.*

*The CLF has always been about "trusting the dawning future more" than hiring for the here and now, and we knew that Lorraine could embrace our future, wherever it would lead. We got that right. Happy trails to Lorraine!*

Reading Jane's words eases my heart a bit, and also makes it clutch a little. *She can drive a school bus?* I find myself thinking. But we never used that skill! How can she say goodbye when she hasn't driven a CLF bus? Goodbyes are like that. Moments of easing, moments of clutching.

Here's what Beth Murray has to say about Lorraine. Beth has shared the Boston office with her for a good number of years.

*If you want a good laugh, talk to Lorraine. Woven between her heart-felt and genuine sense of humor is a person open to change, open to opinions, with an ability to graciously guide the staff toward independence. Lorraine's trust in the staff has led some of us (me) into over-achieving, in the hopes that she will notice. She has taught me to let go of the problems—even the big ones. "No small children have been harmed!" I will miss her stories, her compassionate work ethic, and her ability to turn our conversations into a song—Life is but a song cue! Thank you, Lorraine, for reminding us of the good works of the CLF and the good works of ourselves.*

And here's what Maureen Killoran, one of the many CLF Board Chairs who have worked with Lorraine, has to say:

*Ask me about people I've worked with who've been unfailingly supportive, incredibly competent, and blessedly reliable—yeah, it's got to be Lorraine at the top of a very short list. Oh, and did I say gracious? Creative? And a whole lot of fun? Those are some of my memories of Lorraine Dennis.*

Here's what I can say. When I was considering throwing my hat into the ring for the CLF Senior Minister position, all the people I like best who knew CLF said, "You'll get to work with Lorraine!" I had not known Lorraine. But, in her words, we immediately felt a "Vulcan mind-meld," and it's been like that ever since. I can't imagine CLF without her. Others have described her wisdom and graciousness, her kindness and efficiency. I'll just add that CLF owes a debt of gratitude to the nuns who instilled a sense of responsibility in Lorraine that does not quit at 5 PM. And to Lorraine herself, we owe deep and immeasurable gratitude. ■

# REsources for Living

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

*Lynn has very good ideas in general, but particularly when it comes to having fun. Her list of boring things to do seems perfect for a person who is about to retire from a busy, inspiring job, doesn't it?—LD*

I expect you know the feeling—both droopy and restless. You start pacing around the house, fidgeting with things, maybe look in the refrigerator, and then out it comes: "Mom, I'm bored!"

For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, July and August tend to be the months when things slow down. School is probably out, and the long stretch of free time that you've looked forward to is finally upon you. But the problem is that it can be hard to know what to do with your free time. You get used to running a mile a minute. During most of the year you might feel like there's always someone telling you what you need to do next: *Stop daydreaming! Pay attention! Can you focus, please? Stop messing around!*

But vacation is the time for messing around and daydreaming, for letting your attention range far and wide. It's the time for taking it easy and lounging about—or for running and riding bikes and swimming. It's the time when all the possibilities seem to open up, so that you never know what might happen.

But what do you do with not knowing what's going to happen? How do you handle open space and open time? What do you do when there isn't anything to do? What if there's no school and your friends are out of town and your parents have told you to turn off the TV or the computer or the Xbox or whatever? What do you do when you're bored?

Believe it or not, there's a lot to be said for being bored. Bodies need



time to rest and stretch. Minds need time to wander. Our spirits need time to get back in rhythm with nature. Boredom

might just be a sign that you're having to get used to a different pace of life, which could be just what your mind, body and spirit need.

Besides, being bored might be the best way to move into something new. If you hate being bored, maybe it's a message from yourself to change things up a bit, to get out of your usual ways of thinking and acting and try something different.

Next time you feel bored, try brainstorming a list of things you could imagine doing. They don't necessarily have to be things you want to do, or things that it would be possible to do. You could even start your list with: "Lie around and be bored. Sit around and be bored. Stand around and be bored." But if you keep writing everything that comes to mind, without worrying about whether you're writing down good ideas or bad ones, then sooner or later you're bound to come up with an idea that you like.

Just to help you get started with your list, here's my brainstorm of some slow-paced, boring things that you might enjoy doing this summer:

**Plant some plants.** Watch for signs of growth. Take time to water and weed and look forward to vegetables or flowers. Enjoy putting your work into something that you have to imagine for a long time before you actually see results.

**Lie back and watch the clouds.** Imagine what shapes they look like. Wait for them to change. At night you can lie back and watch the stars. They change really slowly!

**Pet a cat.** Imagine what life would be like if you spent about 18 hours a day sleeping. Boring for sure, but don't most cats look happy?

**Climb a tree.** Then just sit up there. See the world from a different point of view. Look up through the branches and listen to the sounds of leaves moving in the breeze.

**Look—and listen—for birds.** Get a field guide book, or try an on-line field guide, that will help you identify what kinds of birds live near you. Learn their names and what they look like. After all, these are your neighbors. Keep a list of the different birds you've seen.

**Find a secret hiding place.** Bring in treasures to make it your very own. Just hang out in your own secret spot—but let a grown-up know that you'll be hiding out, so that they don't worry when they can't find you!

**Keep a journal.** When you first wake up in the morning, try to remember your dreams. Then write them down, and see if your dreams are speaking to you. Or write down your day-dreams or a poem or a picture or what you did that day or your observations of the world around you. If you don't care for writing, see if you can use a tape recorder to hold your thoughts and dreams.

**Balance on one foot.** Then try it with your eyes closed. Then try balancing different ways, like with a foot held out in front of you. See if it's easier with your arms above your head or out to your sides or just hanging down.

**Look at rocks.** See how many different colors you can find. Check for really tiny ones as well as big ones. Look for patterns, like spots or stripes. Look for heart-shaped rocks or other particular shapes. Start a collection.

**Ask for permission to pick flowers—then press them.** Put flowers between sheets of waxed paper inside a big, heavy book like a dictionary. Put another heavy book on top. Then leave them there for several days. When they have dried, use them to make cards or artwork by gluing them to paper and decorating around them.

OK, there's my list of ten slow-moving things to do when you're bored. I'm sure you can come up with a lot more. Whatever you're up to, I hope those of you in the Northern Hemisphere have a nice, relaxed—dare I say it—boring summer. ■



Church of the Larger Fellowship  
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24 Farnsworth Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02210-1409 USA

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**CLF Unitarian Universalist, 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston MA 02210-1409 USA — Telephone** 617-948-6166

## Music Together

BY REV. MARY WELLEMAYER

I remember there were times  
when the flow of notes  
we played together  
hung shimmering in the air,  
and no one of us was playing  
just one part, but all of them.

In those moments we gazed  
at each other, tender, entranced,  
letting the music spill  
into memory.

I wanted to hold onto the magic, play  
so well  
that it happened every time.  
But no amount of practice  
can teach us  
to hold flowing water in our hands. ■

*Here's one that I wish we had published, since it speaks to me as a singer and in my work for the CLF—so many precious times with CLF members, colleagues and friends.*  
—LD



*From Admire the Moon: Meditations  
by Mary Wellemeyer.  
Published by Skinner House Books in 2005.*



