

Rise in Body or in Spirit

BY WILLIAM SINKFORD, SENIOR MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF PORTLAND, OREGON



It was never my goal to become an elder. Over the years I have looked at older men, older than I am, and thought: *Someday that might be me*. I don't remember those moments as being either frightening or depressing. But I never really inhabited that future. I don't remember projecting myself into a time when "aging" would be an important part of my living. "Old age" was an inevitable destination, if I lived to deal with it, but it was never a goal. Truth be told, I don't think I ever took aging seriously or personally. Until recent years.

I am nearly 70 now—"young" in terms of the popular culture that is so influenced by my Baby Boom generation and the industries that increasingly cater to the large number of those my age. "70 is the new 50." Yes...and no. There most certainly is life, love and productivity at 70 and well beyond.

But there are changes to deal with, too. Changes to that 18-year-old body that I remember, that trim, graceful body that was mine when I had fantasies of a career as a professional tennis star. Changes to that 35-year-old body that I remember, that well-muscled construction worker body that was mine when I ran a small business renovating homes and churches. Those body images are not just memory. They still live in me. What I see in the mirror today feels less like me, certainly, than either of those earlier bodies.

For many years, I understood myself to be middle-aged. But I just don't know that many 140 year olds. So much of popular culture seems to focus on denial of aging rather than embracing its reality. Even to use that phrase, "embracing the reality of aging," highlights the dilemma. Aging is about decreasing ability, increasing limitation, reduced independence, increased reliance on others. Aging is about accepting approaching death. Why would anyone embrace aging? Isn't the only sane approach to resist it?

I have lived a lucky life, so far, in many ways. One of the ways I have been most fortunate—blessed, really—is that I have always been able to rely on my body. My tall, strong, male body was a given. It has been the work of a lifetime to understand how privileged that body has made me. Then I took a fall exiting a small commuter plane in South Carolina. The bruising was extensive, but I soldiered on. In the next weeks and months, my walking became more and more compromised, and the pain got worse, not better.

Surgery that eliminated the pain followed. But my walking and my balance never returned. The final diagnosis was "neuropathy." Though there is a fancy medical definition for that term, what it means to me is that the nerves to my feet and lower legs don't work right.

Exercise and physical therapy, acupuncture and extra vitamins help. But I now wear braces on both legs to correct the "drop" in my feet. I walk slowly and awkwardly, and when I have to stand in one place I need to have a hand on a friendly shoulder or wall. It makes receptions and receiving lines...well, let's just say that I don't enjoy them nearly as much as I once did.

The western medical community tells me, and I have come to accept, that there is no cure. I won't get better. There is no fix. And, over time, there will be some degradation in my abilities. I hate that thought and fear the time when I may not be able to walk or stand on my own.

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**If anything is sacred,
the human body is sacred.
—Walt Whitman**

A monthly for religious liberals

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At General Assembly, our large annual gathering of the clan, I did begin using a scooter to get around. I simply couldn't walk fast enough to get from location to location within the timeframes of the conference. The scooter was easy enough to justify while I was still working through diagnosis and treatment options, easy to justify as I was recovering from the surgery. But now, it is just what I need to do.

Accepting my new physical reality has been a test and is still a work in process. I don't use a scooter at home. Part of the reason is my fear that using an assist of any kind would encourage my congregation to move into "taking care" of me, which would compromise my ability to care for, to minister to them. That is a real concern. The rational part of me, which continues to function well (at least as far as I can tell), knows that my congregation sees me walk awkwardly. I have never fallen in public, but they know.

But pride is also involved. And pride can be a dangerous emotion. Worse, using a visible assist would signal to me that "the end is near," or at least nearing. The invincible younger man who never had to think about physical limitations, who could rely on his body to do what he asked it to do, who never had to think about limitations or compromises—that younger man inside me resents these limitations and, when I allow him to, rails against them.

I live with a sense of betrayal. The body that I relied on for so many years is letting me down. I am still furious about it. How is it possible to be so angry at my own body, at myself?

I am blessed to be doing a ministry that I love. What takes a toll is having to pay attention, almost all the time. It is needing to plan where I can stand. It is calculating how far I can walk. How close can I park to that meeting? How many steps will I have to climb? How long will I have to stand?

At a recent installation where I preached, I decided to take the invitation to "rise in body or spirit" seriously and remained seated. It felt like a watershed moment. Could I give myself permission to acknowledge my limitations that publicly? I found, of course, that the world continued spinning on its axis when I remained seated to sing. It was not a big deal—to anyone other than me. I recently began using a cane. It turns out the

How is it possible to be so angry at my own body, at myself?

world did not come to an end and my congregation does not think less of me.

It felt like another step in accepting who I am now. A healthy decision, no doubt. The problem is that there will surely be more such decisions required and somehow each one presents the same spiritual test. Each one presents yet another opportunity to accept a new, more limited body. Each one calls up again the sense of betrayal, the anger, and the disappointment.

What I struggle most to accept is not any one sign of the reality of my physical limitations, but the knowledge that dealing with them will be part of my life...for the rest of my life.

Yet one of the positive results of having those questions always on my mind is that I have found a new and much more personal sensitivity to issues of disability generally. I always thought I was mindful of those dynamics and supportive of folks who deal with physical and mental limitations, but those issues have moved way up in my list of priorities. And I am very mindful that my story is one of fuller abilities lost, not the story of living differently-abled for a long time or a lifetime.

I am a minister, so I sometimes try theological reflection to help me deal with my new reality. I believe not that we

have bodies, but that we are bodies. I don't believe that there is some soul separate from the physical embodiment of Bill Sinkford. No essence of Bill separate from the presence of Bill. But it is very seductive to begin thinking of my body only as a container for the real me. It's inviting to think that, while my body will inevitably deteriorate and finally die, my essence will live on.

There is death not far underneath all of my wrestling with these changes in my body. Not fear of death, really, because, to date, I haven't experienced fear about my life ending, although perhaps that will come at some point. The challenge is living with the reality that death is the final destination, the end point, at least as we can know for certain. The test is knowing not only that death is inevitable, but that it is right and even good.

Part of ministry, some would say the most important and meaningful part, is being with members of my congregation as they are dying, and sitting with family members and friends as they deal with the loss, the grief, even the anger they experience as loved ones die. In my aging, I find that I am bringing something different with me at those times. Whatever acceptance I gain of my own mortality is a gift I can offer—rarely in words, but in easiness, perhaps even gracefulness, grace-filledness—that I hope communicates and, somehow, consoles.

Being present to my self as I age is a primary spiritual discipline for me, as I study and learn from the stories and examples of so many men and women who have moved through this phase of life. The aging process feels huge; it seems important to do it well. And it feels like it will require all the honesty and as much courage as I can muster to navigate it with grace—even when I stumble. ■

Adapted from a piece published in Landscapes of Aging, edited by Kay Montgomery and published by Skinner

Uses of the Erotic



BY LYNN UNGAR,
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LARGER FELLOWSHIP

You run into interesting conundrums in church life. For instance, in planning readings for a Valentine's Day service that honors the erotic, you find that it's not at all hard to locate some pretty great erotic poems; it's just a challenge to come up with ones that you can read aloud in church. This liturgical challenge, however, got me wondering. Why can't we read erotic poems in church? Why do we think of religious life as being so opposed to the life of the flesh, of sensuality? Are the two intrinsically opposed?

Valentine's Day itself provides a bit of an insight into the question of how we deal with the spirit and the flesh. At a best guess, the holiday harks back to the ancient Roman festival of Lupercalia, a fertility rite that seems to have involved young men drawing lots for the women with whom they would, well, conjoin, so that their fertility by magical inference would also guarantee the fertility of the fields. Pretty racy stuff. When the Christians came to power, however, they regarded the notion of the spirit and the flesh being one in a rather different light, and the holiday was taken over as a saint's day for Valentine.

Why do we think of religious life as being so opposed to the life of the flesh, of sensuality?

Nobody quite knows which of a couple of different guys named Valentine is the official sponsor of the holiday, as both were lovers and Christian martyrs who died without forsaking their loves or their faith. One way or another, the holiday came to be associated with love—romantic love, but with a

religious edge far removed from the holiday's rather orgiastic past.

These days, of course, Valentine's Day isn't a religious holiday at all, but rather an excuse for Hallmark and FTD Florist to remind you that love does, indeed, have a price. Those of us who are in romantic relationships go out to dinner, and those of us who are not might feel disgruntled...and console ourselves by going out to dinner.

But somewhere under the layers of piety and commercialism lies buried a profound truth. The spiritual and the erotic are not opposite poles in our human nature. They are different names, different outlets for a potent life force that is one and the same.

In her essay, "The Uses of the Erotic," Audre Lorde writes:

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea.

The passion, the burning desire that pulls our bodies together in acts of love, is the same erotic passion that stretches our bodies in dance or links word to flesh in poetry or fills the mystic in ecstatic union with the divine. The force that links us together in shared striving for justice comes from the same deep chaos and connection that pulls lovers into one another's

arms. Somehow, I just can't believe that there's some kind of law that forbids that kind of passion from happening in church.

Of course, I first learned about that erotic power in church—just not in the Sunday services. My introduction to passion came in my experiences attending Unitarian Universalist youth conferences. And yes, raging teenage hormones and a certain lack of close supervision did play their part. Burgeoning sexuality was a factor, but it was far more than that. For the first time in my life, everything fit together. Maybe the power did, indeed, come from having the place and the permission to touch one another, but the ways we touched were primarily, and most powerfully, not sexual.

We touched one another in friendship, in hugs and people piles and physical games that were about a kind of inclusion that stood in stark contrast to my experience of high school cliquishness. We touched one another's minds, stretching for new ideas, for new ways of understanding the world. We touched one another's hearts, sharing the depth of our feelings as we gathered in circles, seated on the floor, for worship or huddled in corners to talk late into the night. What we touched was our own, and one another's, souls.

Thomas Moore, in his book *Care of the Soul*, speaks of the soul as something far different from the ethereal, intellectualized quality he calls spirit. Soul, for Moore, is chaotic, iconoclastic, potent and undeniable. It is, as far as I can tell, the same thing that Lorde speaks of as the erotic. It is that power which invades us with its golden glow, whispering or singing or hollering to us that our creativity and our joy and our passion and our strength cannot be bought off with tales of martyrdom or material trinkets. The soul, the erotic, are other names for power, for the spark inside which impels our lives forward, which tells us that who we are and what we do matters.

I have begun to suppose that the reason sex and violence seem to be so interwoven in our culture is that they stem from the same source, the same raw passion or power which is the very definition of who we are as human beings and which inevitably will find a way out. If we don't learn to find a place for that passion in love or art or knowledge or social change, if we find no clear path for our power to take shape in the world, then that power takes on the corrupt form of domination.

Electricity properly channeled through wires powers everything from our refrigerators to our computers. But short-circuited it can burn the house down. Lacking constructive channels for their passion, people find power in corporate greed or gang warfare. Or we find ways to suppress the erotic through

After all, true passion is dangerous.

addiction to alcohol, drugs, food, disengaged sex, gambling or home shopping channels. Or we simply manage to tamp our lives down, learn not to care, sit like Scrooge, counting our gold and pretending that it represents security.

And why shouldn't we? After all, true passion is dangerous. It requires being open to the world, being vulnerable, letting people know that you care. Passion is embarrassing, uncouth. It is the opposite of cool. It can portray our differences as well as our desires, leaving us open to the chance that what matters most to us is laughable to someone else. Passion leaves us exposed, visible in all our faults as well as our glory. I suppose one could say that passion requires taking your clothes off—or at least your armor.

What we're not supposed to notice, however, is that the power of the erotic is *most* dangerous not to the person it runs through, but rather to powers

invested in maintaining the status quo. Like Jesus overturning the tables of the money-changers at the temple, the soul moves through the world upsetting the accepted order of things. It refuses to trade sexual union for a pair of sexy jeans, refuses to accept that profit is excellence, demands that we acknowledge the brilliance of our bodies and the miracle of our senses rather than distracting ourselves with fantasies of smaller thighs or different hair. Again, in the words of Audre Lorde:

We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings.... This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they fall in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives.

As an African-American, Lorde understood that the erotic threatens our racist society with a holistic perspective, more native to the African point of view than the European, which insists that the mind, body and heart are bound up in one inseparable soul. As a feminist Lorde knew that the erotic challenges our sexist society with its affirmation of a deeply intuitive form of knowing, its insistence that each of us has crucial understandings that come from a voiceless place within us, and which are not dependent on a codified set of information that has so often excluded women's lives and insights from the picture.

As a lesbian, Lorde understood that the erotic is a force for authenticity in a homophobic world that so often seeks to limit the ways our passion can find

expression to a very restricted realm of "normal" behavior.

And as a poet Lorde knew that the erotic speaks through us in images and dreams, coloring outside the lines, guiding us toward strange lands and lands where we are no longer strangers.

In other words, in a commodified world that keeps coaching us to ask *What can I get?* the soul keeps demanding *What can I love?* And once love is in the picture, anything can happen. As bluegrass singer Laurie Lewis puts it: "Love comes unbidden, can't be forbidden. It takes you and shakes you right down to your shoes. It knows heartache and trial, but accepts no denial. You can't choose who you love, love chooses you."

I suppose, especially given its roots in the world of country music, this song can sound like a rationalization for a pattern of engaging in lousy romantic relationships. However, to me it suggests something rather different. Love, like the erotic, lives in the deep chaotic places of the sacred. We don't own it, and can't bottle it up in convenient, attractive packages to sell on the common market.

On the contrary, we seem to be designed as vessels to carry love, as channels through which it runs, carrying us forward like pebbles in a riverbed. There is a fire in the belly, a current running through us, which demands that we connect with the world, that our lives make a difference.

Call it the erotic, or passion or power or imagination or creativity or soul—there are currents running through us that must find an outlet in the world. There is a passionate love within us which mutters or shouts that we are not alone, that we cannot live our lives as if we were alone. There is, in our very bodies, an impulse to move, to dance, to sing, to touch and be touched, to be connected in the most intimate of ways to the life force that runs through us all.

■

Inhabiting Ourselves (Excerpt)

BY THE REV. AMANDA POPPEL,
SENIOR LEADER,
WASHINGTON
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Photo by Carol Clayton

Have you ever had an alien invade your body?

By the time I entered the 8th month of pregnancy I definitely felt a little invaded. Both my babies have been very active in utero, and so by this point in the pregnancy I spent much of my time...well, let's say *noticing* this being that had taken over my body. An elbow here, a foot there; they made their presence known, and in a way I couldn't ignore.

And of course, they really did take over my body—not just as a kind of parasitic organism (although let's be honest, that's not a bad description), but also in the way that much of the time I was pregnant I spent thinking about my body, which was really thinking about the baby, about what she needed, whether she was safe and when she would arrive. A very pregnant colleague said to me the other day, "I find it so strange not to know when my body will suddenly take over my life."

Pregnancy can certainly bring a heightened awareness of how we are at the mercy of our bodies. But the truth is, pregnancy is not, by far, the only state that reminds us of this fact. All of us are at the mercy of our bodies, these vessels that transport us through life and, eventually, lead us out of life, too.

For some of us, our bodies are a source of pleasure and pride, doing what we want them to when we want it, carrying us on strong legs and at just the pace we like. For others of us—perhaps for most of us—our bodies have been at times a source of

disappointment, or fear, or pain, or even self-hatred.

Or a source of denial. Plenty of us go through times when we just try to ignore our bodies, ignore the aches and pains, even their mere existence. As inheritors of the Western philosophical tradition, we have our own tendency to separate the life of the mind from the life of the body, to imagine that we are beings that can exist on a purely cerebral level without the annoying hang-ups of our bodily forms.

To which I say: *How's that going for you?*

**"I find it so strange
not to know when my
body will suddenly take
over my life."**

We have yet to evolve into creatures with giant brains and little wispy tails of being, as one might see in a science fiction movie. We are instead people with decidedly physical natures, and no matter how much we may pretend, those physical natures are a huge part of what makes us who we are, what makes us human.

My favorite passage in Eve Ensler's *The Good Body* is from a monologue given by a Masai woman.

Do I like my body? Do I like my body? I love my body... My fingers, look at my fingers. I love my fingernails, little crescent moons. They lead right up to my arms—so strong—they carry things along. And my legs, my legs are long. Masai people, we are tall, I get there fast.... Look at that tree. Do you see that tree? Now look at that tree. (Points to another tree.) Do you like that tree? Do you hate that tree 'cause it doesn't look like that tree? Do you say that tree isn't pretty 'cause it doesn't look like that tree? You're a tree. I'm a tree. You've got

to love your body... You've got to love your tree. Love your tree.

Our trees, our bodies, are uniquely our own. They carry in them the stories we have lived, the struggles we've experienced. They also carry in them the care we show them, the way that we feed and nurture them, the way we parent them. No body is perfect. Some feel further from perfect than others, I know. I have had my own share of journeys with this body, but I'm still aware that it functions very well.

Some of us have bodies that don't function well at all, which can make getting through the day difficult. Some of us have bodies that let us down in big ways, that are subject to diseases and experiences that are exhausting and painful. And all of us—all of us—have bodies that will not last forever.

But we also only have this one body, this one vehicle to get us through life. And the fact that it gets us around at all still seems to me to be something worthy of our thanks and our compassion. ■



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From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I've always thought that God the Father had a really sick relationship with Mother Earth. I mean, here's the earth, thought of traditionally as female. She is giving us 100% of what we need to be alive—food, water, air, a nice blend of moon and sun, everything. Our very bodies.

And then there's God the Father—invisible, a deadbeat dad really. And we are supposed to dedicate all of our gratitude and our praise to Him. We are free to treat Mom any way we like—she's always there, not interesting or important. But Dad—we must treat him with reverence.

Seriously, no one I know, starting with me, believes that. But those ancient patriarchal myths are there in all of us, consciously or unconsciously, swirling around in our psyches. And they are echoed in how we think about our bodies and our souls. Our bodies, like the earth, are always there. We can treat them however we want. Nothing sacred about them.

Our souls, invisible and elusive—now those are important. Religions focus on saving them, or growing them, or bringing them together. We have UU congregations called “All Souls,” but never any I've known about called “All Bodies.”

But my body matters as I walk around in it—as an overweight white woman, perceived by many to be uninteresting but by virtually no one to be dangerous. However much I might wish to be able to do so, I can't lend my body to a young Black man and say, here, take this for a day or two so you might have some rest from the violence coming at you ceaselessly. No body-swapping possible.

We've got the bodies we've got, and it's only by living as those bodies that we grow our souls. Living in my particular body has taught me particular ways to interact, to speak, to think. (Of course, many other factors besides race and gender are relevant as well—age, nationality, income, family history, education, ability, and so many others.)

So our bodysouls grow, and struggle, and experience joy, and new younger bodysouls emerge, and old bodysouls die. And we know that the invisible is real—that the ancestors are with us and the unborn call out for us to imagine them—but we also know that it is in living bodies, here and now, where life takes place.

We have UU congregations called “All Souls,” but never any I've known about called “All Bodies.”

I am sitting here in a specific body writing this, as you are in a specific body now reading it. My words are abstractions that can be argued about, but my breath and yours are concrete necessities if these words are to be shared. Our lungs mostly function without effort from our minds, so it can be easy to dismiss them as dull, unworthy of notice. But the moment someone's lungs, or heart, or brain cease functioning nothing else matters.

The moments when we are at the edges of life—when a new baby is being born, or someone is dying—we see the interconnectedness of it all clearly on the edgeless edge, and we see how completely body and soul are one. Anyone who has seen the dead body of a loved one knows that it is, *so quickly*, not our loved one anymore. The absence of the breath, the spirit that infuses it with life, renders it a shell, empty.

All of this is critical in our community that does not physically gather, where people identify through reading this newsletter, or by joining us online with photos or words or video, or by dropping us a line. Though our bodies are not in the same place, we are connected to one another as bodies. It is important that some of our bodies are older; and some of us are sick, struggling with pain; and some of us are incarcerated, without freedom for self-determination; and some of us are able-bodied while some of us have limited mobility or ability. Our bodies matter. Every single one of them.

So if I were to invent a new religion, perhaps it would be dedicated not to saving souls but to saving bodies. Black bodies. Poor bodies. Children's bodies. Queer bodies. Transgender bodies. Sick bodies. Bodies of varied ability and mobility. Saving bodies not by forcing them into some tiny cookie cutter definition of what is good and what is bad, not by trying to make them conform to some abstract idea of salvation, but by providing what is needed for every single person with every single body to know themselves beloved on this earth.



And maybe I don't have to invent a new religion. Maybe that's what we're all doing here together, in this far-flung body of a Unitarian Universalist congregation, allowing people to be exactly where they are and who they are. Maybe we're honoring the unique location of each person in their very particular body, here in the Church of All Bodies. ■



Biscuits and Star Stuff

GUEST COLUMNIST,
THERESA I. SOTO,
 MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
 SOCIETY OF FLINT, MICHIGAN

Note: The main character in this story uses the non-gendered pronoun "they."

"Mama," said Quinn.

"What's up?" Mama asked. She could see the sun shining on the top of Quinn's curly hair. She measured another spoonful of mayonnaise into the bowl. Mama was making drop biscuits.

"We traced our shadows on paper during art class."

"Mh-hmm," Mama said. "Did you like that?"

"Not that much," Quinn said. "My shadow wasn't as long as most of the others."

"What did your teacher say about that part?"

Quinn let out a long breath. They blew air toward their forehead and made the curls at the front of their head bounce.

"Miss Malone says that every single body is different."

Mama nodded.

"She says that every body is a good body," Quinn mumbled.

"Do you want to pour the milk in?" Mama asked. "Biscuits for dinner."

"I love biscuits! Yum!" Quinn said. "I washed my hands with soap. Do the milk?"

"Go ahead." Mama said.



Quinn very carefully poured the milk into the bowl.

"Thanks, sweets," Mama said. She took a fork from the drawer and mixed everything together gently.

Quinn watched Mama scoop the dough onto the cookie sheet and slide them into the hot oven. They watched the biscuits for a while.

"Mama, they're puffing up," they said.

"Yup. Baking powder and milk together do that to the dough," Mama said.

"I'm going to grow, right, Mama?" Quinn asked.

"You sure are. You grow a little bit every day."

"And my body's good," Quinn said.

"Actually, Q, your body and my body, our bodies and other people's bodies are fantastic."

"How do you know?" Quinn asked.

"Do you remember when you learned about atoms in school?"

Quinn nodded. "The very small parts of everything."

"Our bodies are made of things like carbon and oxygen atoms," Mama said. "And it turns out that those atoms came from the stars to make up the building blocks of Earth. You are made from pieces of the stars, Quinn."

"Stars?" Quinn asked. They were starting to smile.

Mama was smiling too. "Stars, Quinn. When you feel not too sure that your body is good or when you are waiting and waiting for your body to grow, you remember that your body is good and that it comes from good things."

"Okay, Mama," Quinn said.

Mama took the biscuits out of the oven. She blew on a piece of a biscuit to cool it off, buttered it, and gave it to Quinn.

Suddenly, Quinn's eyes grew wide. They looked at the biscuits. None were the same. The one on the right middle was a bit smaller than the others.

"Mama," Quinn said, "they're all

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different." Mama nodded.

"And we'll probably eat them all, right?"

"Probably all of them," Mama said, "with chili and salad."

"And they're made of good stuff." Quinn said.

"Fantastic," Mama said.

Quinn smiled and went to wash up for dinner. Biscuits! ■



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Blessing for Bodies

BY REV. NANCY SHAFFER

May we creatures of bone and tissue
know our bodies well:
the fourth rib, and how it rises
higher than third, not so high as fifth;
how it feels to the thumb, slowly traced,
and under it, how the heart rests.
May we know that space where
no ribs lie, and unshielded, we bend.

May we know the bottom of each
toe, and that tender arch where
no skin touches ground;
also skin smoothed soft by clothing.

May we know the quick curve of the head
before it sits on the spine,
and the tiny hollow just behind the ear;
the length of the forearm,
lifting food to lips, and how lips become
a circle, waiting—and knowing this,
cease our study of war. ■



From Nancy Shaffer's meditation manual Instructions in Joy, published by Skinner House Books in 2002, and available through inSpirit: The UU Book and Gift Shop (www.uuabookstore.org).

