



# Fall Journal 2017

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork



Free minds, open hearts.

## A Member's Story - Kent Martin

Growing up on the high plains of Southeastern Colorado I never heard of, or encountered a Unitarian Universalist for the first 25 years of my life. As the oldest of four children in a Mennonite family, our social and religious life was focused around the church and I embraced that tradition through high school and the Mennonite college I attended.

But in my teens I started asking questions of my pastor, such as, "How do we know God exists?" He sent me to the books of C.S. Lewis which attempted to prove the existence of God logically, which made no sense to me. In college I started reading about Eastern religions, a variety of philosophers, and looking at the Bible more closely. I wondered, "Why were there no women apostles? How can a loving god condemn people in other religious traditions? Why did an all-powerful god allow so much suffering? Why was Christianity used to dominate other cultures?" In the Southwest, Native Americans were enslaved by Spanish priests. In my twenties I began reading Alan Watts, Herman Hesse, and other writers that drew inspiration from Eastern religious traditions. Living in New Mexico in the 80s I happily "worshiped in the great blue dome" of the southwestern sky, biking, hiking and skiing instead of attending any church. I likely also absorbed some of the free-wheeling New Age thought prevalent there.

Aimee and I met and married in New Mexico in 1990, then moved East in the mid-90s. When we moved to Eastern Long Island and had children we started looking for a church community. None of the Protestant congregations we visited felt like a fit – they were too conservative. George Wilson, a Presbyterian pastor who sang bass with me in the Choral Society of the Hamptons, told me about the



UU congregation meeting in Water Mill. Around 2000 I started attending the UUCSF and brought our then two-year-old son Jack. I enjoyed the warm fellowship, and the sermons from Merchant Marine Captain and UU Pastor Chris McMahon.

I love the freedom to pursue one's individual search offered in the UU tradition. I've learned to be comfortable with the mystery of life, and draw spiritual inspiration from

many sources. I feel right at home in the warm community at the UUCSF, and appreciate the focus on social action. I'm pleased that both of my children came up in the RE program and have hopefully absorbed the values and traditions of Unitarian Universalism.

I'm proud to say I'm a member of the UUCSF!



**Our Jeanne Wisner serving her tasty veggie soup Sundays after service.**

## Words From Our Minister



### *Let's talk about money!*

Did you notice your reaction? There are so many reasons that we don't talk about money, and most of those reasons have to do with the discomfort that talking about (or even

thinking about) money brings up. Some of this discomfort is personal and some of it is social. Many of us are taught not to talk about money because it is rude, or crass, or tacky. Employers discourage workers from comparing notes about how much money they earn (sometimes flat-out prohibiting it). Even closer to home, many people don't talk within their own families about money—spouses don't talk to each other and parents don't talk to their children.

Talking openly about money can take away some of the emotion that we carry about what is *really* a fairly emotion-less topic. Money itself is a tool, but we infuse it with a lot of emotional weight. And then, when we tuck that away in secret as something we cannot talk about, we give money more emotional power than it deserves. Actually, talking about money is like *shining a light* or *opening a window*. It can bring clarity and freshness to our conversations, to our relationships, and to our understandings of ourselves.

I will admit to you, talking about money can produce a physical response—of discomfort or disease—in my body. I first started talking openly about money when I joined with my university colleagues to form a labor union. In order to form a union, we needed to be honest with ourselves and with each other about how much money we were being paid. We recognized the way that we had internalized the idea that our personal and professional value was attached to how much money we were paid. *If you are worth more, you are paid more.* Personally, I recognized the shame that I carried about being so low-paid, despite being a hard worker who contributed to the strength of my organization. As a group, we came to see the ways that se-

crecy about money was stressing us out, keeping us apart, and preventing us from effective collaboration.

Surely, a congregation is not the same thing as a university, but our relative secrecy or openness about money can be affecting us in similar ways. This year, as part of our developmental plan, this congregation is working on stewardship. One of the things this congregation noted as a plus before my arrival is its financial stability. And in order to maintain our long-term financial stability, we need to be able to talk freely and openly about money. As individuals and as a congregation, we need to understand how our decisions and behaviors around money are shaped by our financial histories. And we need to have a clear sense of how our decisions and behaviors around money are reflecting our values—either intentionally or unintentionally. We want to be making intentional decisions around money that clearly reflect our values and our vision for this congregation.

Reflect for a moment: What are the feelings or desires that influence your behavior around money?

- Control
- Trust or Faith
- Joy
- Fear
- Obligation
- Fairness
- Shame
- Guilt
- Pride
- Independence
- Interconnection
- Reciprocity
- Self-reliance

None of these is intrinsically bad. Understanding our motivations can help us to have a better understanding of our decisions. And when we are making group decisions about money, understanding the many different money motivations around the table can help us to move through conflicting priorities. Being attentive to our many different motivations can help to lead us to some underlying approaches. *Do you approach money with a sense of scarcity? abundance? generosity? gratitude?*

I'm excited to continue this exploration with you. Beyond the individual, personal growth it offers, I trust that exploring money together as a congregation will help us to live more fully into our mission and vision for this community.

One way that you can be a part of this exploration is through the *Wisdom Path* workshops on money and spirituality. Upcoming Sessions: Money and Society 10/29; 11/12; 11/19; 12/3.

**Kimberly Quinn Johnson**

## From the President



I love to watch the Canada Geese fly back and forth over my neighborhood. Everything I am doing is temporarily engulfed in their tribal honks. I marvel at the way they

take to the air and become part of a harmoniously rotating “V” formation, sometimes leading and sometimes following, but each adding its energy and voice from every vantage point. I wonder if our human species could learn something about good leadership from geese, and I learn that others have wondered the same thing.

If we were a tribe of geese, for instance, would we be equipped to steer through any blinding storm or to know when we are standing in a quagmire and need to take action? As our nation is leading us more toward its own quagmire of fear, hatred, and indifference, are we equipped to steer us through? Unitarian Universalism is synonymous with the universal principles of love, inherent worth, justice, equity, and compassion as its compass. As a study in leadership, we can look to the wisdom of the geese tribes to show our congregation how to get to where we need to go, and I am rarely disappointed when I turn to nature for some guidance.

To summarize Joel Garfinkle in his article, “*Leadership Lessons from Geese*,” the following geese facts may help us to think about how we might apply these lessons to strength in our congregation during adverse, as well as prosperous times:

**Fact 1:** As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an updraft for the birds that follow. Our faith community shares a common direction to get us to where we are going quicker and easier. Our ideals, visions, and values bring strength to every individual person on his or her journey.

**Fact 2:** When a goose falls out of formation, it feels the drag and so quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it. If we work together to get to where we want to go for the good of all, then no one person does all the work. We accept and give help to the best of our abilities.

**Fact 3:** When the lead goose tires, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies to the point position. Take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership, recognizing that we are part of an interdependent web.

**Fact 4:** The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those in front to keep up their speed. Each goose is an active and influential participant in the journey. We use the democratic process within our congregations, and in society at large, to say, “You are as good as I am.”

**Fact 5:** When a goose is in need, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help or protect it until it is able to fly again, or dies. We will stand by each other in good *and* difficult times. We are compassionate in human relations.

Understanding goose leadership can help us to act against exclusion, oppression, and violence; to nurture the health of the earth by respecting and responding to our environment; to use the democratic process; to strive for peace in our hearts and the world around us; and when fear strikes, *to stand on the side of love*.

**Pam Wittenberg**



**We all turned out for a summer clean up at the Meetinghouse.**

## New Member Biographies

### Jeanne Marie Merkel

I would like to thank the members of this congregation for their warm welcome when I became a member in June. It has been such a gift to be part of a supportive community during this difficult year. I've been invited to share with you a little about my life and background, and so here goes!

I grew up on the North Fork, part of a big family (I'm # 8 of 9 kids), and so I have always valued community. We spent a lot of time boating, hiking and exploring Maine. The natural world has always been the place I feel most connected to the sacred. My mother was a very resourceful Renaissance woman who taught us lots of life-skills. She founded the Pine Tree Day Nursery in Riverhead, which grew to care for 60 children a day, and I grew up working there. Being raised with that kind of responsibility developed my ability to "look around and see what needs doing," (My mother's favorite advice.)

At 14, I met my husband-to-be, Chris Young. He was 4 years older, an avid actor in community theatre, and a piano tuner. He introduced me to Christianity and I had a powerful conversion experience. In our search for a spiritual home, we explored Pentecostal and Baptist churches, and then found a vibrant Hebrew-Christian community of over 1,000 members in Massapequa. I was drawn in by the powerful sermons, Hebrew music and dance, and the rituals of the Jewish faith. I fell in love with the music and learned over 100 Hebrew songs. The sense of spiritual community I experienced there imprinted me deeply.

Chris asked me to marry him when I was 16, and so I graduated a year early, and married. Our first daughter Beth was born in 1978, followed by Shoshana ('79) and Rivkah ('81). Around this time the Hebrew Christian Community began to have leadership issues, and we made the difficult

**Jeanne Marie Merkel continued on page 5**

### Tom Murphy



Dear Rainbow people,

When asked for a brief bio for the Fall Journal, initially I selected to give a brief interview.

Thanking my teacher, I can write. I wished to express appreciation for genuine UU hospitality and fellowship. Great people, UUCSF Minister Johnson? Euff said... December's kinda cool and spring beauty incarnate. Providence is good. It is in people as exemplified by UU tradition and practices.

*Live in '17, Baby!!* Nourish the brave. A live place holdership on what can be a perilous jaunt. Liberties demand vox, and the UU has a voice.

Born in NYC on a Monday in February 1960, there was a parade (Old George Washington was having a birthday, too...) I think I grew up in Fort Salonga, Northport side, and managed enduring friendships with people from the Kings Park side. It took courage, but I married a Kings Parker girlie... Quick to diggin' yer way out of a hole is to dig stairs. Good practice, that.

UUism began for me in East Bridgewater, Mass., where I ran coffee Bingo nights. (In 1976 I slept in President FDR's personal rail car, adjacent to the meeting.) Paul John Rich was the Reverend. We'd hash out virtues of Rock vs Power and Money. It was a trip. Reverend Rich was a good man.

I have attended the UU in Huntington, New York over the years, and my second son was dedicated there back in 1996. I have been a Bayman for just two years now. I'd come to meeting by bicycle. Kent Martin affords me vehicular travel (thanks!) and it's tough to pass up the pineapple. So I go! Fellowship's connected me with fine, fine folks, and I well up, misty-eyed, in thinking myself a Member.

Ours is a special time, and a happy place. Cherish the joy. Enjoy and soar.

**(Written by Tom Murphy, transcribed by Diana Lindley)**

**Jeanne Marie Merkel continued from page 4**

decision to leave. Added to that loss, was the fact that Chris' participation in community theatre became so all-encompassing that I was essentially left a widow. We separated amicably when I was 23, and I left the Day Care Center and moved with my three little girls to Southold.

Good fortune would have it that I discovered the First Universalist Church of Southold. This community opened its arms to me and my children, called me into leadership, and inspired me to discover my own innate spiritual path. I am eternally grateful to The Rev. Sara Moores Campbell for her encouragement and wisdom, and to the many mentors who helped me to develop my gifts. I loved the process of creating worship services and preaching, and became an active lay-leader. I experienced first-hand the power of religious community to nurture the spiritual growth of its members and to transform lives.

It was church members who encouraged me to apply for a job at the Mattituck Library, driving me to my interview when my car failed. The skills I had honed in the congregation served me well in my 25 years of library work. It was at the library that I met my second husband, Frank Wills. Our friendship developed slowly and grew into a deep love. It was Frank who encouraged me to finish my Bachelor's Degree at Lesley College, after 20 years of part-time study.

In 1996, I lost my little brother Paul to AIDS. He was one of my best friends, a fabulous artist and musician. That same year, my daughter Beth gave birth to my grandson, Isaac – a new creative spirit. Later I welcomed two more grandchildren: Avenue and Viola Smith, born to my daughter Shana.

In 1998, with the encouragement of the Southold Congregation, I entered Union Theological Seminary in NY City, with the intention of preparing for UU Ministry. I was drawn to Union for their excellent Department of Psychiatry and Religion. I was not disappointed. My studies at Union were deep and transformative. The worship services were filled with creative, provocative sacred theatre. While at Union I went through some powerful therapeutic work, and came to realize that my true love was psychology, spirituality & the arts.

I graduated from Union in 2001, and I started a spiritual book store called Anam Cara Center in 2003, and gathered a wonderful community

through that venture. I began exploring Celtic Spirituality and went on Vision Quest in Ireland. In 2008, I traveled to Peru, studying with indigenous elders and learning their healing practices.

In 2011, Frank hurt his back shoveling snow and his spine began collapsing. After months of pain, he died in August of 2012. I felt the sacredness of this threshold, how present he still was to me, the ache of loss, yet the beauty of the profound connection we shared. After the pain subsided, I began the work of readying the house for sale, finding a new home on Shelter Island, moving and getting settled. It was a 5 year transition that finally feels complete.

I am grateful that I now live closer to the UUCSF, and can renew my bonds with the UU community. I look forward to using my skills and gifts to support the congregation in its work and mission.

**Jeanne Marie Merkel**

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### **Helping Hands Fund Needs Your Help**

As many of you know, the Helping Hands Fund exists to assist non-profits on the East End to do their work. Your weekly contributions to the "bowl at the back" make it possible for the marginalized in our community to have their voices heard. Since our last report, we have been able to make contributions to the NAACP for youth to attend a conference and to the Town of Southampton Anti-Bias Task Force in support of their annual free picnic for the community, where diversity was celebrated in many forms, including dance, music and food.

Over the years, your generosity has filtered into our local area and has demonstrated to our neighbors that the UUCSF "Stands on the Side of Love!" Now, as we continue to ask for your donations, I am also asking for your ideas. We have communicated our values to varied populations of the East End, including Native Americans, African Americans, immigrants, youth and seniors. Please let me know of programs and non-profit agencies in our area that we could add.

The focus of Helping Hands is to make a difference in a specific program or focus, rather than operational funds. Even if you are not sure if this is the case, speak with me and we can try to match our fund up with the desired agency. Our goal is to have our Unitarian Universalist values be heard loud and clear here on the East End of Long Island.

**Carol Holstein**

## Aware of All Eclipses

September 21, 2017 - 10:51am

This morning, brushing my teeth, I closed my eyes. I saw only black. I opened them again, all without thinking, and the light rushed back in; not just light but the outpouring of information it brought, the edges, the planes, the colors, the textures of the world; its orientation, heaviness, opacity and translucence, weight and delicacy and shimmer, its meeting points and the interplay between everything and everything. So much. It spoke to me from all around.

I immediately closed my eyes again, overcome by that inpouring. Even the slightest glimpse, a momentary opening of a closed eye, can give me so much connection to the world; all in a microsecond I saw far more than I could take in or detail in words. If that's true of a momentary glance, what an abundance of wealth I take in with my eyes when they are full open, and maybe even more when I let them rest and gaze.

I just lost a good bit of the sight in one eye. I woke one morning and saw a black round sun against the background of the window by my bed. I turned and looked at my alarm clock. There was that dark circle again. It had moved with my gaze. I got out of bed, put on the kettle for my tea, and called the eye doctor.

Yes, it was a long day of drops and tests and bad news. And yes, I realized, if it happens again in the other eye that would be quite a change for me — I would be legally blind. And so I'm precariously between two worlds right now, and working hard to keep my balance, and my root, in the one where both eyes work — at least to the extent that is left to them now.

When I don't focus on it, it doesn't seem like too big a deal because the other eye is so willing and able to fill in. The unfathomable brain is weaving the pieces of the patchwork of information that it's gathering from my left eye and putting it together with what is coming in through the right. And one thing I'm *seeing* is that what is happening

with the left eye now is that I am actually seeing the eye itself; it's getting in the way of its own flow that all my life has been an open river of the information it's been pouring into me; allowing, interpreting for me. It's as if the eye were saying, *'hey, pay attention to me, not to the information I'm giving you.'*

And I see that happening in so many other ways in my psyche and in my life as I get older. My body is saying it. My mind is saying it; my ego is too. All the parts that I think are separate from the world around me.

This is a transient, ephemeral time of adaptation, getting to be a witness to this process. The blood vessel broke only a few weeks ago, and my brain hasn't finished relearning how to see, but is in the process of relearning how to weave things together in this new way. So I'm getting to watch this as it happens. I'm thinking that, if the progression stays on this course, I will experience a seamless flow of connection with the world through my eyes as I did before. It won't be the

same as it once was, for sure. Those patches of comprehension have undeniably become more fragile, almost threadbare. But it will still seem like a whole quilt, a blanket that I can wrap myself in.

But of course there's that fear, that finally there won't be enough material for my brain to work with, that this time of change will simply be continuous, fast or slow, with the dear brain working to accept, weave, interpret, and categorize a whole new, and fading, alphabet.

When this first happened, I had to cancel a class, tell my daughter, ask a question of a friend. And every time I dictated into my iPhone the phrase "my eye," it typed in "*mayeye*." Uncomfortably close to the word "*mayday*," from the French *m'aidez*, or help me, but also reminiscent of that old childhood game, *mother may I?*

May I, Great Mother, each day, for one more day, continue to see?

### Tina Curran

*Tina Curran has taught tai chi and qigong for many years and enjoys photography. She lives in Hampton Bays.*



## UUCSF Picnic at the Teepee: Impressions

On Sunday, September 10, from 1 to 4, a fun time was had by all at the summer picnic at Bill and Sarah's house in Southampton. With the organizational help of Jeanne Wisner there was a large variety of tasty food and good company. Bill's house, known as the teepee, for its unusual shape, is right across from Big Fresh Pond. The water was so clean and refreshing. Sarah's dog took endless leaps off the dock to retrieve a stick.

Many of us also took to the water in swimsuits, kayaks and paddle boards, which Kent Martin so generously supplied. The time flew by and it was fun catching up with longtime members as well as some new faces.

**Hilary Helfant**



**Eva Roberts-Vazquez on Fresh Pond during our summer picnic at the Dalsimer Teepee.**

I was a little worried when I heard about Bill's invitation to our UUCSF community to his "teepee". Does he really have a teepee on his property? I worried that this was some sort of cultural appropriation. I was relieved to learn upon arriving with Jeanne Wisner that "teepee" is a nickname for his house that Bill and his wife live in, due to its shape: "A-frame," I believe. Whew! What a relief.

It was great to see Bill, especially knowing of his health challenge this past year, and to meet his family. Many brought great food, potluck style. I made a bean salad and brought veggie burgers to share.

It was a joy for me to get to play with their puppy, 8 months old, who loves to swim and play fetch. He was a good boy...although all the food was enticing he did not steal any people food!

For me this felt like a UUCSF retreat! Snuggled in the woods with a beautiful lake! Sassafras was abundant with its telltale three different leaves.

Thanks to Kent Martin and (Bill's stepdaughter, Gina) who helped keep an eye on us by the water...some of us were able to go paddle boarding for the first time including Edna Trunzo and myself. (*Very impressed with Edna gliding swanlike across the lake!*) Some went kayaking and swimming. Thanks again to Bill and his family for their hospitality, and all who participated.

**Eva Roberts-Vazquez**



**Hilary's guest contemplates desert.**



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## Junk Science vs. Real Science: How Can We Tell the Difference?

**A Panel Discussion and Conversation.** Saturday, November 18, 4:00 p.m. at the Meetinghouse

We're all biased by the opinions of our friends and our tendency to believe those who tell us what we want to hear. That's just human nature.

This is especially the case when science bears on issues of political or religious importance, where we have spent much of our lives forming, and then justifying opinions; and unconsciously choosing friends who think as we do.

There's no easy answer to this conundrum, but there are strategies by which we can mindfully avoid being taken in: not just by deliberate liars, but even more insidiously by sincere advocates of false ideas in which they happen to believe.

Many think science simply accumulates facts. This leads to consternation when science seems to change its mind. Biologist **Stuart Lowrie** will help us to understand how science really works.

Engineer **Edson "Tip" Brolin** will then provide examples of voodoo science. He'll show how purveyors of ideas that are either simply false, or at best unproven, use scientific-sounding speech to lull us into uncritical agreement.

Finally, physicist **John Andrews** will discuss the ways in which liars manipulate statistics to stand truth on its head. "Beware of misused averages, misleading charts, and cherry-picked data," he says.

Each panelist will limit his presentation to 15 minutes. A discussion with members of the audience will follow. Light refreshments will be served.

## Food Choices Affect Global Warming

A peer-reviewed British study showed how one's food choices can contribute to a more livable planet. The good news is that you don't have to be a vegan in order to do your part. If you want to go vegan, that's excellent, but there are other choices that get a good rating. Comparing the diets of thousands of subjects, the study found that "high meat eaters," that is, those who eat more than a quarter pound of meat a day, added almost 3 tons of greenhouse gases (CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent) to the atmosphere each year. Vegans added only a little more than one ton. Interestingly, people they classified as "low meat eaters," that is, those who eat less than two ounces of meat a day, were almost as good as fish eaters and ovo-lacto vegetarians, with each of these groups adding about a ton and a half of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere each year.

Other sources of information indicate that the type of meat you eat is just as important as whether you eat any meat at all. The quickest and easiest way to reduce the carbon footprint of your diet is to cut way back on beef and lamb. On a pound-for-pound basis, beef results in four times as much greenhouse gas emission as chicken. Chicken and fish are about the same. Turkey and pork are in between, about twice as greenhouse-gassy as chicken. These are rough guidelines, depending on a number of factors including how the food is cooked, but they should be good enough as rules of thumb.

So hats off to the vegans, but don't think that you have to go all the way there to reduce your food carbon footprint. *Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.*

**John Andrews**



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