

## **PATHWAYS, TRAVEL and the JOURNEY part I**

We each journey through life in our own time and at our own pace. The journey has many features that we can describe, many ways that we can look at these stories of our lives. I think that telling our stories allows us to look at our journeys in new ways each time we tell the stories, giving us a new opportunity for reflection, meditation, and introspection. But telling our stories is also an opportunity for us to connect in new ways with people around us, whether they have travelled great distances in time and space with us or if they are newcomers, potential new friends and allies.

As I was thinking about how I might structure this month's 3 part series on the Journey, I thought I might break it up into the physical journey, the intellectual journey, and the psycho-spiritual journey. Today I will start with the physical journey, but this, like any particular view is just an arbitrary construct and separating the physical journey from its deeper meanings is not really possible anyway. I will use images and memories from my own life journey to illustrate one possible way of moving through life, but my hope is that I will thus invite each of you to call forth and reflect upon your own journeys.

As most of you know, I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, near enough to frequently visit the museums, shop, dine, and explore downtown; far enough away to have a life sheltered from many of the challenges of a big city. I am a lifelong Cubs and Bears fan, and an occasional fan of the White Sox, Bulls, and Blackhawks, whom I of course would prefer to any other teams in their leagues but really did not usually get very excited about. Chicago is home, but not somewhere I really ever want to live again! It is where I am from, where I go to visit friends and family, but not where I am or where I am going! When I was in college and even most of seminary, I thought I would most likely settle in Northern Illinois or Southern Wisconsin. I had no idea how many other places my journey would lead!

I graduated from Riverside-Brookfield High School where I was involved in sports, student council, band, and German Club. I started college at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana but graduated from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, where I wrote my own major in Religious Studies. I began at the United Methodist Seminary, Garrett-Evangelical, in Evanston, Illinois, but graduated from Bethany, the Church of the Brethren Seminary which was then in Oak Brook, Illinois. After my 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Seminary, I accepted an Intern Year position at the United Methodist Church in Riverton, Wyoming under the Rev. J. Holland Vernon. Holland had come from rural fundamentalist roots and grown into one of the most intelligent, compassionate and progressive ministers I have ever known. The year I spent working with and dialoguing with Holland not only kept me aimed at ministry but provided me with tools and experience that have continued to support my life and ministry ever since. The connections I made that year also shaped my physical journey for years to come. Oh yes, and during that intern year, I also met and married Terri, my first wife and the mother of my children.

In Riverton, I conducted my first funerals, including ones for stillborn infant twins and a suicide. I preached at least once a month, met with the board and several committees but primarily worked with Jr. and Sr. High Youth, taking them to several youth gatherings and camps, learning to drive a small bus, and also taking them camping in the Little Big Horn Mountains. I also sang with the choir, played with the handbell choir, taught a couple courses at the local Jr. College and experienced just about every facet of ministry. I met Terri while visiting parishioners at the local hospital where she had her first job as an RN. From Riverton, we traveled up to the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone Park several times and up into several other natural areas to hike, camp, and explore. The year I spent in Riverton, Wyoming, brought about some of the most important learning of my life, it was a time and place I shall always treasure!

Returning to Illinois with Terri to complete my final year of seminary was a dramatic change. We moved into an apartment on campus and I focused on completing my studies and then seeking a ministry position back out west. Terri had no problem getting a job at a local hospital.

There were no openings for me in Montana or Wyoming that year, so I accepted an appointment to the church in rural Walden, Colorado, just 60 miles S. of Laramie. Walden is a town of about 1000 set in the North Park area, surrounded by higher mountains but sitting at 8000 feet of altitude. Both weeks of summer were magnificent, but when the passes closed it could feel very isolated. Terri was 7 mos. pregnant with Jessica when we arrived in Walden, and she decided to stay with her mother in Riverton, about 200 miles away, when she got close to delivering. Terri later decided to go back to work in Riverton part-time, and I asked for a move to a bigger town. We next went to Great Falls, Montana, where I served as Associate Minister at First UMC, the largest of the local United Methodist Churches.

From Great Falls, we explored Montana and I got involved with the camping programs at Flathead Lake United Methodist Camp. Our son Aaron was born in Great Falls, but Terri and I decided to divorce and she moved back to Minnesota for a few months before we were able to work out arrangements in a way that brought her back to Montana. I moved to a three church parish centered in Bridger, Montana and then to another not far from Great Falls. My last full-time United Methodist Parish was as pastor to the small Kremlin Church and Associate at the church in Havre. After 2 years there, I needed a break and took some time off from ministry, accepting a position for the State of Montana in Child Protective Services.

After a year of CPS work, I applied to study with Matthew Fox at the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality at then Holy Names College now University in Oakland. I came to California in August 1989 and my life changed again dramatically. I loved the program at ICCS, and I met Jane the night I arrived. We were 2 of the 3 Methodist Ministers in the program, which included about 60 Nuns, Priests, Ministers, and Laypeople who were interested in Creation-Centered, not creationist, spirituality.

Matt Fox had been silenced that year by Cardinal Ratzinger, then of the Office of the Inquisition, later Pope Benedict, in part for having Starhawk on the faculty, so during the first semester we did not hear from Matt.

The program also may have been smaller than usual that fall, but was no less fun, exciting, and re-energizing. Getting to know Jane also certainly helped my mental attitude, and being in the Bay Area was just neat. The 9 months I spent at ICCS took me to an entirely new place in my journey in all categories, even if it wasn't quite my first trip to San Francisco! At ICCS, I began to do Dream Work and study Jung with UU Jeremy Taylor, took a class on the Shamanic Journey, studied Cosmology with Brian Swimme, danced and sang and became more grounded than I could remember being. Jane and I married at the turning of the decade, then she returned to her church in New Jersey while I finished the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the program arranging to join her in New Jersey after graduation. Jane returned to finish the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the MA program at ICCS 2 years later.

In New Jersey, I did some part-time United Methodist ministry, while working for the state in Child Protective Services. On days off we hiked and took drives exploring New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania. We frequently got together with Jane's sister and her husband and with her other family members. Things were mostly good, and it was beautiful and green in Morris County where we lived and Sussex County, where I worked. I was itching to get back into ministry, but we were both ready to leave United Methodism behind as we started the process of seeking credentials as UU Ministers. I will say more about that in the next couple of sermons.

We moved to a nice little house in a resort area of the Poconos near Milford, PA. Once Jane and I had been approved by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee for Preliminary Fellowship, we began the process of searching for one or more churches that wanted to have us. Jane worked for a couple years half-time with the UU Church in Meriden CT, while I worked with the UU Fellowship of the Poconos. In 1996 we were invited to Candidate and were elected Co-Ministers of Pacific Unitarian Church in Rancho Palos Verdes, and we returned to California. Jane's daughter, Jenn, stayed on the East Coast to begin college at Bard in upstate New York.

After a brief battle to adjust custody periods for my then teenage children, they both joined us for the school years and later graduated High School while we

were in Rancho Palos Verdes. For 7 of the 8 years we were in Rancho Palos Verdes, Jane first and later I also worked with the UU Fellowship in Bakersfield. During the SoCal years we got used to being UU Ministers, took camping trips to Sequoia National Park and I worked with the camping programs at DeBennville Pines, our UU camp near Angelus Oaks. We also periodically took trips to New York, Chicago, and Florida, where Jane's parents lived. After attaining the 2<sup>nd</sup> longest ministerial tenure at PUC (without killing anyone), 8 years, we resigned! I candidated at and was elected Minister of the UU Church of Little Rock, Arkansas. Jane took some time off and then went to Springfield, MO as a half-time consulting minister. Jane and I divorced in 2011 but remain good friends.

Where beautiful coastal Rancho Palos Verdes had been semi-arid with occasional storms, Little Rock was generally hot and humid with frequent storms. Little Rock also had mild winters sometimes lasting for a few weeks and providing 1-3 measurable snowfalls, at least one of which would often result in several days of icy streets. The attitudes of people in the mid-south did not seem all that different from those in the mid-west. People were generally gracious and welcoming, if a bit more conservative than I would have preferred. Some of the true Southerners talked funny! We found a nice house with lots of trees, a wet-weather stream running out back, a hot-tub, and 4 bedrooms, or to be more accurate about our use, 2 bedrooms and 2 offices! With proceeds from the sale of the house in Rancho Palos Verdes, we also were later able to buy a couple acres with a shack including an Arkansas addition on Greers Ferry Lake as a day off getaway. Arkansas is a beautiful green agriculturally based state with lots of trees, lakes, rivers, and quite a few hills they refer to as mountains. Amidst many good experiences, three trips we took while we were in Arkansas stand out. In 2006 we came back for several days to Yosemite. In 2007 we went to Turkey for a wonderful tour as guests of the Institute of Interfaith Dialogue. In 2008 we met some old friends from Rancho Palos Verdes on Kauai. After an extended ministerial honeymoon followed by a few years of roller coaster ups and downs, I resigned from the Little Rock church exhausted, but tied for the longest ministerial tenure at UUCLR at 9 years!

In 2013, Jane and the girls helped me pack up the Little Rock house, and my son Aaron helped drive back to California after I candidated and was elected Minister of First UU Church of Stockton. My work with the Bakersfield fellowship helped prepare me for Stockton, for I could immediately see by all the trees that Stockton was much greener than Bakersfield! I was glad to be back in California, much closer to my kids in Phoenix and now LA. Wonderful to be able to take day trips to the Mountains or the beach and to the Bay Area. And Stockton itself has continued to grow on me!

I haven't traveled that much outside the US, and I still need to see Alaska, but I have lived in or visited 49 States and a few places outside the US. I have learned to adjust to wherever I am pretty quickly, to explore new places, and to see the good in just about every place I have been. There are amazing people wherever I have journeyed, as well as beautiful natural features and interesting things that people have constructed. I feel sorry for those people who never venture beyond the familiar area in which they are born and live their lives. To be a wanderer is a great gift and opportunity.

I have taken many paths in my journey, as I suspect have most of you. Most UUs are not satisfied with easy answers and most of us have ventured far from our early homes physically, as well as intellectually and psycho-spiritually. Our journeys have great meaning for most of us, for they have brought us adventure, insight, understanding of the world, and reasons for hope even in difficult times. The physical aspects of our journeys may be just the outward layer but they are indicative of our quest for wisdom and knowledge, our search for truth, our desire to find meaning even when the world around us is chaotic, violent, and torn by warring religious and political factions.

May our travels this summer bring us each to a place of higher understanding as we continue the journeys of our lives! So may it be! Amen.