

Dear Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship:

I was surprised when I started to write this letter that we had been going together for about 13 years now. I can't believe how the time has flown. Just to be clear – I don't believe in love at first sight – infatuation? Sure. Lust? Yup. But enduring love in a good relationship? That takes time and work, but it seems we've done something right, because I know we love each other.

We first met on a cold crisp Sunday morning in early March of 1997. I had recently turned 40 and had walked out of the church of my youth, unable to tolerate the steadily growing distance between what it offered and what I needed to be whole. I remember being warmly greeted at the door. I remember being teary-eyed throughout many of the readings and hymns that day. The minister at the time, Louise Ulrich had spent an hour with me on the phone the night before, telling me about this place. My jaw had dropped when I went on-line afterward to uua.org and read the statement of principles. Never before had I seen such a perfect articulation of what I had found in bits and pieces throughout the time of my searching.

I don't even recall what the service was about (tho' Del could probably look in the archives and tell me). It actually doesn't matter, because whatever you did and whatever you said, then and since, were a balm to my aching heart.

Not that I had suffered some acute heartbreak when I left my church. The break was fresh but the wound was many years in the making. It had become clear to me that I had been suffering from spiritual malnourishment. I had no idea how brackish the water was that I had been drinking there for all the years of my life until I drank the cool, clear, living water that you offered here.

I had had a steady diet of rules, dogma and certainty. Any doubts or challenges were ignored or dismissed as a sign of spiritual weakness or rebellion. My struggles and questions as I actively explored other spiritual traditions during mid-life, took place in a vacuum. Books, articles, the occasional uplifting

conversation were available, but I really had no community with which to share this process. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was a lonely search.

There was no category in my spiritual experience for what I found here. Humanism, the best of liberal Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Native Spirituality and paganism , plus other voices without clearly defined categories all sang in a special kind of harmony here.

More important, and this is what made my tears flow, was the explicit value of supporting each other during the questing; of not demanding allegiance to any idea or sect; of not getting hung upon finding the "right" answer; of seeking beyond the narrow-minded human tendency to win, to dominate, to think of ourselves as better and more holy than" that other group". Talk about paradigm shift !

I said earlier that I knew we loved each other. What does that mean? Well, for one thing, we have survived past that initial courting phase when everyone is on their best behaviour. Love has to endure the bumps and bruises that happen when human beings try to do the dance of life on the same floor. Well, I certainly see lots of differences on beliefs and practices among our membership. I have seen problems sorted out with respect. Although I know there must have been some exceptions to that, I can only judge by my own experience and what I see is good. Things generally get sorted out with respect, no one being banished, shunned or put on the Express Bus to Hell.

Scott Peck (author of *The Road Less Travelled* and *People of the Lie*) spoke of evil in terms of deliberate action to kill the spirit and stop the life force of others. TO turn that coin to its other side, we could speak of love as the deliberate facilitation of the spirit, well-being and growth of others. LUF, by this definition, I know that you love me . You tolerate my searching and seeking, my comings and goings , my presence and my absence without requiring blind obedience, conformity or needing me to park my brains at the door. I can nourish my spirit and explore my wholeness through my rational mind and my love of imagination, symbolism and metaphor. I am especially grateful that I can walk the pagan path here. For most other religious communities, this would be anathema. I love the pagan path for its deliberate

evocation of the Divine Feminine and for its use of ritual (making spiritual concepts concrete through bodily action such as blessing and anointing). Pagans here can not only walk here freely, but walk it each in his or her own way – whether it be a literal belief in deities and forces of magic or at the level of metaphor, or someplace in between. And even those of you who have no use for such a path still manage to respect those of us who choose to walk it among you.

And how do I love you back? Well, perhaps not as well as you deserve. I don't attend every Sunday, nor do you see me at many of your community events here. My contribution is not among the best or brightest here. I can only strive to emulate the spiritual aunties and uncles here whose sleeves are always rolled up for the tasks that need doing, be they painting, running meetings, feeding the hungry or asking the tough questions.. NO apologies or excuses. I do what I do, but I know that I could do a better job of loving you back and I WILL keep trying to do that.

If love is a process of supporting each other's respective growth, then there is much love here. LUF – you and I are both “works in progress”. Our unfolding and our imperfection is exactly what makes us wonderfully human and, I believe, is the active expression of the God-Force in the universe. I want to continue walking and seeking with you for as long as we both shall live. And I thank you for your love.

Love, Hanusia