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Deadline for next Spire submissions:
February 15 2021



In Memoriam

Jaime Wilson Dunton, husband of Marjorie Lee 'Sooky' Black
~ died October 3, 2020

Gaynor Parry Williams, husband of the late Jean
~ died September 3, 2020

Barbara Joyce MacDonald, mother of Joy Sallans and Laura Stephen
~ died September 16, 2020

Hedvig Henry, wife of the late William
~ died October 8, 2020

Constance (Connie) Linda Legg, wife of the late Thomas
~ died October 16, 2020

Kathleen 'Kay' Walker ~ died October 27, 2020

Trudy Kassner, wife of the late Max, mother of Mike and Stephen
~ died November 3, 2020

Also in our thoughts:

Clem Holden, husband of Sylvia, in Vermont ~ died August 22, 2020

Vernon Charles Nichols, husband of Susan ~ died September 22, 2020
(in Oregon). Vernon was Minister at FirstU 1971-1983

Lee Fraser, wife of the late Donald ~ died October 1, 2020



Caring Contacts

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From the Spire Editor



Nine months and counting. Masking continues, causing foggy glasses, muffled voices and an inability to lip-read. COVID questionnaires are endless: at the dentist, the doctor, the optician, medical centres, the lab, the pharmacy, the community center, even the vet where only animals are permitted inside the building! On and on it goes! But there is hope and there is light. As I write this, positive reports are coming in from vaccine developers, there is an expectation of more stable leadership south of the border, and each day, an abundance of festive lighting brightens neighbourhoods around town.

Every week I join a very small group of artists for in person painting sessions...socially distanced of course, each sitting at our own table, masked

when not seated. Weekly activities, mostly by Zoom, are keeping me sane and engaged with others in a way I never considered before. Who knew an on-line exercise class could be so satisfying? Or that singing in a Zoom choir session could be such a mood-booster?

Reading your submissions this month has been very gratifying. Our first feature article, a real gem written by Maryan O'Hagan, is guaranteed to keep you riveted. From our regular columns - Pat's Ponderings, Religious Exploration, Musical Interludes, Meet a Member, Social Responsibility Council News - to an interesting comparison between the Spanish Flu and COVID-19, and to everything in between...we're sure you will enjoy reading the entire issue. So grab a cuppa – be it

coffee, wine, or something else, sit back and enjoy!

Of course, it's never too early to start thinking about what you might like to contribute to our next issue (March, 2021). Whether it's a 900-word Feature Article (one per issue, published on a first-come first served basis), a poem, or a personal essay or newsy article (max 450 words), if you'd like to share something with the congregation, we'd like to hear from you. Photos (jpeg format) that accompany submissions are always welcome.

Wishing you all good health, peace and big warm hugs. And better days ahead in 2021!

~ Marg Lee, Editor

spire@firstunitarianottawa.ca

Remember Huxley?



Well, meet their cousin Jessie, here to remind us all to stay active this winter.



'Jessie' courtesy of Karen Munro-Caple

Whether that's outside or inside, staying active and keeping connected will help us all chase away the winter blues.

We'd love to see and hear from you at any of the many activities listed on the [FirstU Calendar](#).

If you need help setting up Zoom please email with your phone number to:

ZoomInfo@FirstUnitarianOttawa.ca

One of the FirstU whizz-bangs will get in touch with you.

~ submitted by the Committee on Shared Ministry

Pat's Ponderings ~ Rev. Patricia Guthmann Haresch



So many people started to decorate for the holidays earlier than usual this year. It's understandable. 2020 was a bear of a year, so why not? Why not enjoy an extended holiday?

With the holidays on my mind and the time I have been spending with Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, I'm thinking about some of her reflections on giving and gifts at this time of year.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the author has a chapter called The Gift of Strawberries. In it, Robin shares early childhood memories of wild strawberries. *"It was the wild strawberries, beneath dewy leaves on an almost-summer morning, who gave me my sense of the world, my place in it."*

Robin is an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation in the US and shared that strawberries have a significance to her people. In their Creation stories, the first person, the first woman, "Skywoman," had a beautiful daughter whom she carried in her womb from Skyworld. Her daughter "grew on the good green earth, loving and loved by all the other beings. But tragedy befell her when she died giving birth" to twins. Skywoman buried her beloved daughter in the earth and from her daughter's body grew the strawberry. *"The strawberry arose from her heart. In Potawatomi, the strawberry is "ode min" the heart berry."* A precious and delicious gift from the Earth. A gift expressing a deep love.



These days when I eat strawberries, I savor them even more. "Heart berries", I think to myself.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass* I learned that June's full moon has come to be known as the Strawberry Moon. The name originating with Algonquin tribes in eastern North America who knew June's full moon signaled the ripening of wild strawberries.

The author reflects...

...even now, after more than fifty Strawberry Moons, finding a patch of wild strawberries still touches me with a sensation of surprise, a feeling of unworthiness and gratitude for the generosity and kindness that comes with an unexpected gift all wrapped in red and green. Really? For me? Oh, you shouldn't have.

For her as a child,

...strawberries first shaped my view of a world full of gifts simply scattered at your feet. A gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in a realm of humility and mystery - as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source.

Unaware as a child of how much her parents must have struggled to make ends meet, Robin "experienced the world in that time as a gift economy, "goods and services" not purchased but received as gifts from the earth." In her family, almost always they made homemade gifts for each other. She notes,

I thought that was the definition of a gift: something you made for someone else. We made all our Christmas gifts: piggy banks from old Clorox bottles, hot pads from broken clothespins, and puppets from retired socks. My mother says it was because we had no money for store-bought presents. It didn't seem like a hardship to me; it was something special.

Pat's Ponderings cont...

There is a bond that comes between the giver and the receiver, especially when the gift is homemade. When it is a gift of thought and time and care. The author adds, "gifts from the earth or from each other establish a particular relationship, an obligation of sorts to give, to receive, and to reciprocate." When you receive something, you want to give back.

Robin learned from the strawberries how she could return the gift.

When the berry season was done, the plants would send out slender red runners to make new plants. Because I was fascinated by the way they would travel over the ground looking for good places to take root, I would weed out little patches of bare ground where the runners touched down. Sure enough, tiny little roots would emerge from the runner and by the end of the season there were even more plants, ready to bloom under the next Strawberry Moon. No person taught us this - the strawberries showed us. Because they had given us a gift, an ongoing relationship opened between us.

2020 was a bear of a year. And sometimes it is difficult to see the gifts around us that come unbeckoned, unearned. Hard to raise up within us a stirring of gratitude when all we can see ahead is a long, stark winter. But as we approach the holidays, may we have the eyes of a child who sees this time of year as one surprise after another, lights, and treats and music and gifts whatever they may be. Whether the latest toy of the year from the store, a piggy bank from old Clorox bottles, a hand-knit pair of mittens, or Grandma's strawberry jam made from strawberries she picked last summer.

As Robin writes, "it is human perception that makes the world a gift. When we view the world this way, strawberries and humans alike are transformed."

May you happen upon surprises and gifts this season. May you find the joy that comes with giving this time of year. And may you find yourself caught up in the cycle of transformation that comes in a time of reciprocity.

Holiday blessings to you!

~ Rev. Pat

Religious Exploration ~ Neo Yaxley

I hope everyone is doing well during these difficult times. I seriously did not think we would be apart for this long. One of the most challenging aspects for me during these times is the not knowing when it will end. I also find it difficult to plan anything in the future due to the fluctuations between red zone, orange zone and green zone status.

On a positive note, though, we continue to persevere, so I have started up our online UU kid's sessions again. We plan to have two groups of children who will meet on a rotating basis using Zoom. The groups are the Chalice Play Kids (ages 2 to 7) and the UU Kids Group (ages 7 to 12). For information about the meeting topics and the theme, please look at the eUU for details. If you are not currently signed up, please do so.

I am asking all parents to please encourage your children to participate in these classes. The classes are beneficial for community building amongst children and youth. This is certainly one of the best ways you can support our RE online program. Every little bit helps, and while we have some children who are participating on a consistent basis, we will benefit from having more kids participate, providing the group with more energy.

Thank you in advance for your support. I look forward to seeing new faces.

Neo Yaxley,
Director of Religious Exploration



How to make Strawberry Ornaments from:

<https://www.auntannie.com/FridayFun/Strawberries/>

Musical Interludes ~ Deirdre Kellerman



Oh, how I miss singing with you all! However, we have still been making music together, in new and different ways.

Our three choirs continue to be active through online rehearsals and recording projects. The singers have been working hard to learn new technologies, such as Zoom and audio/video recording. And not only that, they are also learning to listen to and appreciate their own individual voices - not always an easy task when you're used to singing in a group! I am so impressed and grateful for the dedication, vulnerability, and enthusiasm choristers have shown.

For those singers who are taking a break from choir - we haven't forgotten about you! You are still a part of our community and we're looking forward to when we can sing together again.

Every time I record a hymn or song for a Sunday service, I think about the whole congregation singing with me, and I hope you are singing along from home! We are still creating music together, from afar.

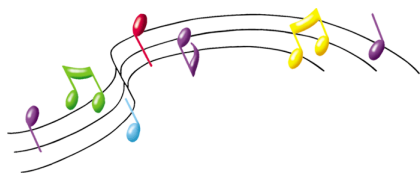
Song Circles are the first Thursday of each month, with a different theme each time such as UU hymns or jazz standards. Everyone is welcome! Caroling is coming up and there are some great themes planned for the New Year. Please join us on Zoom; details can be found at <https://www.firstunitarianottawa.ca/music.html>

Wishing you much happiness, safety, and comfort during this holiday season.

Yours in song,

~ Deirdre Kellerman

music@firstunitarianottawa.ca



Feature Article: Mindfulness in Transylvania

by Maryan O'Hagan

For as long as I can remember I have been very uncomfortable in closed spaces preferring instead open air and long walks. Fresh air and expansive landscape was what I expected when I joined a Mindful Walking Pilgrimage through Transylvania. I never suspected that I'd be faced with a terrifying memory.



It was July 2018. I was one of four Canadians who joined 15 American Unitarian Ministers and students on the pilgrimage. The route was through portions of central Transylvania in Romania, where, in the 16th century, Unitarian congregations were established for the first time in history. We walked through rolling hills and quiet pastures, dodged snarling dogs, enjoyed the antics of village storks, immersed in the sanctity of very old Unitarian churches, enjoyed meals prepared by villagers and listened to stories of church life through Unitarian leaders. Throughout, our tour facilitators encouraged mindfulness; that is to be in the moment with an open, accepting heart.

My fearful memory arose the day we hiked along a river at the base of a deep gorge. Sketches of bears, a snake and falling rocks posted at the path's entry cautioned of dangers ahead. Recent rains had raised the river's water level eroding its already narrow banks. We picked our way along the river's edges so slim, steep and muddy that we needed to grasp low hanging branches to avoid sliding into the

fast-moving water. The path took us across the river's raging, dirty brown waters via swinging suspension bridges, some with only one hand rail. Each of us had to cross alone because two different footfall patterns could create a warping motion pitching a hiker into the roiling waters below. I loved the sense of mastery when I reached the other side and picked my way down to the path.



One crossing took us near a dark cave with a wide entrance into which several of my fellow hikers were being absorbed. My heart

raced, not with the joy of completing a perilous crossing but with fear of the cave. As others were swallowed voluntarily by the cave's yawning mouth, I felt terror clamping down every muscle and drenching me with sweat. What had happened to my internal intrepid hiker? I wanted to run from the cave, to escape the fear. But I had to stay and wait for my fellow

pilgrims as they explored the darkness within. I forced myself to breathe deeply. "Get a grip", I thought unkindly to myself. Then out of nowhere came the message to relax my body and be in the moment. Yes, and to open my heart to the experience. To gently inquire of the fear - what are you about?

And there it was - the memory of that trip to Hilda's cottage on Lake Kamiskotia when I was eight. Hilda and Mom were in the front seat, Hilda driving and Mom laughing. I was squeezed in the back seat between Joanne and Patsy, Hilda's daughters. We were jammed among swimming gear, our picnic basket and our sweating bodies. Feeling crowded did not bother me, then.

We reached the cottage, peeled off our sweaty clothes and slid into our bathing suits. After a tiring dog-paddle we clambered out on the dock anchored a short distance from shore. Such an accomplishment we agreed. "Yes," said Joanne, "Did we know we were on water over our heads?" I jumped up and declared, with 8-year-old logic, that if it was that deep, I was getting off.

Feature Article: Mindfulness in Transylvania cont....

As I bolted into the water, Joanne grabbed my arm. With one arm held and the other flailing I was unable to swim. I kicked my feet but could not free myself from the force of the water pulling me down. The water enveloped me, bubbles slid up my body and over my head. Joanne's muffled yelling reached me through my panic - her grip slid up my arm to my wrist and let go. There was no escape from this water enclosure. I began to sink.

I can still feel Mom's hands on my bottom as she pushed me up to the surface and Joanne pulled me up onto the raft. I do not know how we got to shore or if we ever returned to that cottage. We never spoke about my near drowning.

Such a powerful memory had invaded my being. I now understood my fear of enclosures, my abhorrence of crowding. By staying in the moment with an open heart I had been able to connect with myself as a little girl

who, in nearly drowning, had taken away the strong message that tight enclosures could kill her. But that was then at a lake in northern Ontario and this was now, outside a cave in Transylvania. My breath calmed and steadied as I came back to the present, to my feet firmly planted within sturdy hiking boots on solid rock outside the cave. By being present to my fear with an open heart, by practicing mindfulness, I was able

to have compassion for my fear and to let it go. Eight-year-old logic could be replaced with the logic of a mature woman, able to assess danger and make sensible decisions. My fellow pilgrims emerged laughing into the light from their brief caving adventure. We continued our pilgrimage along the muddy path leading away from the cave. My breath flowed with ease and I smiled.



Remembering holiday times with our beloved FirstU community . . .



We will be back together one day



Settled Minister Search Committee Update

We are very happy to report that our Settled Minister Search Committee (SMSC) continues to bear fruit at this icy time of year!

The SMSC's most recent accomplishments are the development of a Congregational Record (CR) and the creation of a promotional video for prospective ministers. This video captures both the warmth of our congregation, and the autumn colours of Eastern Ontario. The target date for the release of the video is the end of November; you can find the video in the Minister Search section of the [FirstU website](#).

The 40-page Congregational Record was a massive undertaking, led by SMSC Chair Jane Lindsay and the rest of the committee. It is like a resumé of the congregation, and it will be the main document reviewed by each minister applicant. This document contains 82 sections, all about us! A lot of the information in the CR came from direct participation - either of congregants or staff - in focus groups

and interviews, in the Beyond Categorical Thinking Workshop, and the Congregational Survey – all completed by mid-October. From there, the SMSC had a very short turnaround time to get it all compiled and successfully submitted under deadline.

This information will also help inform the upcoming candidate screening process, and will likely be used in different ways outside the scope of the SMSC mandate. The committee is looking at how best to make it available to congregants. One example is that the relevant congregational input gathered in the Beyond Categorical Thinking workshop was shared with the Embracing Diversity Committee, to inform future activities.

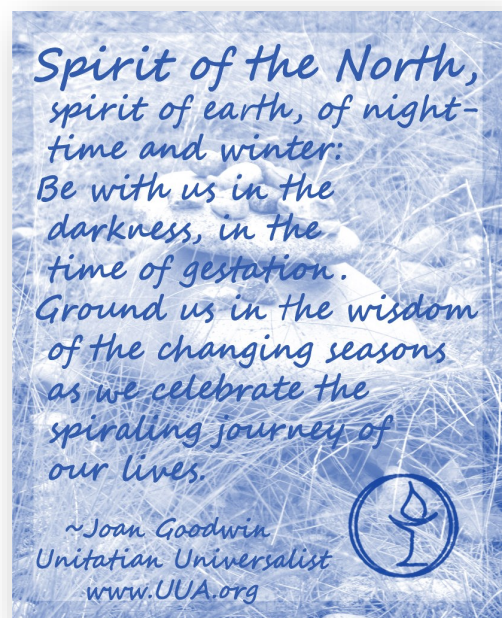
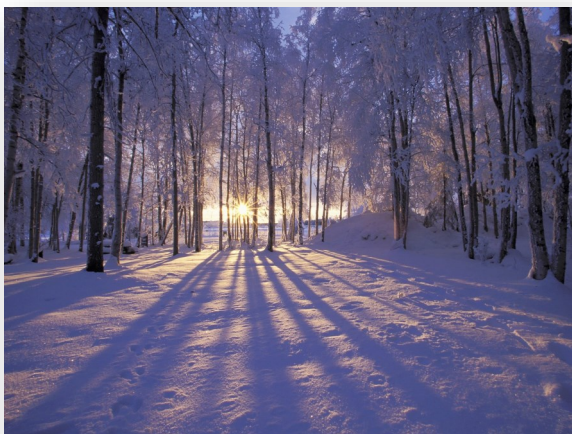
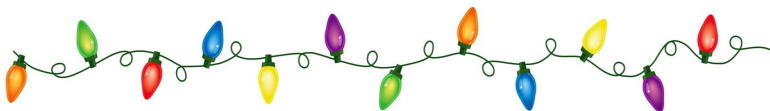
Next on the SMSC agenda is to develop the tools that will help the committee review applications and have initial interviews with multiple candidates early in the New Year. Then, a variety of virtual meetings and interviews will be booked with the top

candidates in February and March, giving the committee the chance to get to know each of them better and witness them deliver a sermon to an outside UU congregation.

Although most of the work of the seven-member committee must be done at arm's-length from the congregation, in order to ensure a fair and confidential process, it could not have been so "fruitful" without the input and participation from so many. Besides thanking all participants in the workshop, survey, focus groups and interviews mentioned above, the committee would also like to thank the volunteers who helped them meet all of their goals and deadlines so far.

"Thank you!"— from your SMSC members: Amy Bérubé, Mary Ella Keblusek, Jane Lindsay, Mike Lloyd, Jodi McIntosh, Phil Nagy, and Lena Talback.

~ submitted by Mike Lloyd, SMSC



Social Responsibility Council News

We're on our way to becoming an accredited Green Sanctuary Congregation!

At last year's Fall Congregational Meeting, we voted to make action on the climate catastrophe the priority for our social responsibility work for the next four years. The Environmental Action Working Group (EAWG), with the support of the Board, has decided to bring this work under the Green Sanctuary Program.



What is the Green Sanctuary Program?

Green Sanctuary is a Unitarian Universalist Association program which helps UU congregations fully live our seventh principle and work to achieve the vision of a viable and just world for all. The program has been around since 1989, but was revamped in 2020 to focus on the climate emergency and on taking 'bold, urgent and effective climate-action and climate-justice work'. What a perfect fit for us! Achieving Green Sanctuary accreditation will be one of the major accomplishments of our 4-year focus on addressing the climate catastrophe.

The Green Sanctuary program has three goal areas:

- mitigation to reduce the causes of global warming;
- adaptation and resilience to reduce our personal and community vulnerability to the impact of climate change; and

- climate justice, to work in partnership with those who are the least responsible for the crisis and have the fewest resources to deal with its impact.

Why Green Sanctuary?

Working towards Green Sanctuary accreditation means we're part of a network of UU congregations all working to address climate change. Already we've been on calls with other UU congregations, sharing ideas, discussing roadblocks, building enthusiasm. The Green Sanctuary program also encourages us to take a collaborative, whole-congregation approach. The recently launched Hope to Action PhotoVoice project, a joint initiative of the EAWG and the Mental Health Working Group, is an excellent example of how this collaboration can work (see separate article).

What's Next?

You'll be hearing more about Green Sanctuary in the coming weeks. If you're interested in getting involved or have ideas for projects, please contact Mike Fletcher at: fletchmo2@gmail.com.

~ submitted by Donna Bowen-Willer on behalf of the Environmental Action Working Group



From the Global Justice Working Group

La Siembra Co-operative, the first registered importers of Fair Trade Certified cocoa and sugar in North America, was established as a worker cooperative in 1999. Twenty-five producer co-ops support more than 47,500 small-scale family farmers in 14 different countries. Member-owners invest in and own the business together, and share the enterprise's profits, enabling them to receive fair value for their products. Each member has one vote, ensuring democratic decision-making. As a result, the communities all benefit, and farmers are able to properly feed and educate their children.

La Siembra means "sowing" or "planting time" in Spanish, a symbol for the seeds of change being sowed through co-operative and fair-trade business models.

The Global Justice Working Group at FirstU supports La Siembra with the sale of Fair Trade Certified cocoa and sugar products, including a wide assortment of chocolate and coffee beans. Any surplus realized from purchases of these Fair Trade foods will help the Global Justice Working Group of FirstU continue their quest for justice and support of environmental action.

There will be further information about the sale of these products in the eUU. For more information about the various products available, contact Ria Heynen r-j.heyne@bell.net, 613-828-8468.

To learn more about La Siembra go to <https://camino.ca>.

~ submitted by Ria Heynen

Social Responsibility Council News *cont...*

Transforming Environmental Anxiety: PhotoVoice and StoryTelling

The FirstU Mental Health and Environmental Action Working Groups are partnering to facilitate an intergenerational project designed to transform our environmental anxiety into hope and gratitude for a new, cleaner and greener world. The overall, multi-phase initiative is called "*Confronting Environmental Crisis: Transforming Fear into Empowerment*" and one of the goals is to participate in the UU Green Sanctuary and Campus Accreditation process.

The first part of this project, *PhotoVoice* and *StoryTelling*, launched October 11 in an Earth Speaks presentation by Maury Prevost, with introductions by Mike Fletcher and Suzanne Tellier, accompanied by a TedX Talk video by DeWitt Jones entitled "Celebrate What's Right with the World!". A video recording of the launch is now available on FirstU's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP2Ri576dsY&t=11s>

and is a recommended starting point for understanding *PhotoVoice* and *StoryTelling*.

Here's the concept

PhotoVoice – We will encourage people to participate by taking two photos and telling one story about them. One photo will show us an environmental crisis as each individual sees it. Additionally, participants will be asked for a second photo that celebrates "What's Right with the World".

StoryTelling – By responding to the following questions, each person will have an opportunity to reflect on how to cope and live in our new reality:

- Why did I choose these photos?
- How was I feeling during those times?
- What is one action that I can do to help Mother Earth become healthier?

Here's how we have implemented it

A *PhotoVoice* Facebook group was created under the *Unitarians for Climaction* Facebook group. There are currently 25 members in the group and more invitations outstanding. If you have a Facebook account and wish to join, please send an email to: photovoice@firstunitarianottawa.ca to receive an invitation. Once you accept the invitation, you can then post to your heart's desire.

Many FirstU folks have been posting photos on Facebook in recent months that celebrate the beauty of nature. Maury Prevost did a posting in the *PhotoVoice* Facebook group on October 19 as an example of what we would like people to contribute.

If you don't want to use Facebook for this, you can submit your photos and story by email to: photovoice@firstunitarianottawa.ca.

Feedback on the project should be sent to the same email address.

~ submitted by Maury Prevost on behalf of the Mental Health Working Group



Why did I choose these photos? — Because they were taken within just a few minutes during a recent walk near home. The first photo is of Highway 417, part of the Trans-Canada Highway going through the heart of Ottawa, which exemplifies our over-dependence on fossil fuels and cars for transportation, part of the climate crisis. The next photo, of a sumac in its best fall colour, was taken from exactly the same spot as the first one, just looking in a different direction, showing how nature can be beautiful right beside a much less appealing scene.

How was I feeling during those times? — I was feeling good about being out for a walk along the Rideau River, on paths that are not disrupted by Highway 417, because they pass under it right beside the river.

What is one action that I can do to help Mother Earth become healthier? — Walk more and use my car less.

Meet a Member: Lisa Sharp

This series of brief bios of congregants was initiated by Isabel Burrows



“My top priority for being on the board was to increase our diversity,” Lisa Sharp explained. She is now our president.

Lisa comes from an Evangelical childhood background, but she stopped going to church when she was a teenager. She was turned off by what the Evangelical churches of her mother had to say about the role of women and about how they

treated gays and lesbians. While not part of the LGBTQ+ community, she identifies herself as “an ally”.

Lisa began coming to the Unitarian Congregation in her mid-thirties. *“I learned that religion and spirituality could be different.”* She says that everyone expresses spirituality differently. For her, doing art is one way, though she admits to not being proficient at it. Music is also a chosen path. One aspect of our faith with which she identifies strongly is a respect for other people’s beliefs. She is sorry to see that we do not always follow this principle wholeheartedly.

At FirstU, Lisa has served on various committees and took a major part in the development of the Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality program. Her interest in OWL came out of her work with

women and youth for 15 years in various Ottawa social agencies.

Lisa obtained her undergraduate BA at Carleton University, her LLB at the University of Ottawa, and in 2005 became a lawyer. She has almost completed her LLM (Masters of Law) at Osgoode Hall. In that capacity she has opened her door to members of the LGBTQ+ community. *“There are rainbows displayed in my office”* she observed, and she has spoken to groups of lawyers and judges about the needs of LGBTQ+ families. She is especially proud of one case where she successfully represented a transgender parent in a trial winning custody of their child, a first in Canada.

Lisa is the mother of four children and step-parent of three others. She has 6 grandchildren.

~ submitted by Reuel Amdur



To Brighten Your day...



COVID-19 and the Spanish Flu

Earlier this year I agreed to compare the approach being taken by our congregation to COVID-19 with the approach the congregation took to the Spanish Flu epidemic which arrived in Ottawa in September 1918 and stayed in the city until well into 1920.

My main sources of data on the Spanish Flu were from the following:

- Minutes of the Board and Congregational meetings
- Annual Reports of the congregation
- The congregational chronology written by our former archives volunteer, Jean Ahmed*.

For general background information I looked online, in particular at a Canadian Encyclopedia article entitled '[1918 Spanish Flu in Canada](#)'. From this article I learned, among other things, that the Spanish Flu claimed about 50,000 lives in Canada.

I was unable to find any articles in our archived newspaper clippings from 1918-20, that discussed the Spanish Flu in regard to our congregation and I was surprised at how few references there were to the epidemic in the above-mentioned sources. With one exception, the congregation did not seem to be unduly affected in a negative way by the illness, and the normal routines at the church more or less continued as usual. The one exception occurred in October of 1918 when Sunday services were cancelled for three weeks, and presumably some of the other regular church activities would have been cancelled as well.

Why is it that our records don't give much attention to the Spanish Flu? One reason might be that our congregants were so used to dealing with the devastating bad news arising from the tragedy of World War I that

they fatalistically looked upon the epidemic as just one more misfortune to be coped with as best they could.

Following is a comparison which contrasts a few of the events associated with the Spanish Flu and COVID-19.

In October 1918, church services were cancelled for three weeks. In March of 2020 we also shut down our in-church services and most of our on-premises operations although the present shutdown has lasted months rather than weeks.

In 1918 our Women's Alliance group raised funds to purchase ingredients to make many gallons of broth. The broth, prepared in the church kitchen, was distributed to influenza patients in the community. In 2020, some of our congregants also extended a helping hand to the community with financial donations made to organizations such as the Ottawa Food Bank and the Odawa Native Friendship Centre.

Our church school superintendent, reporting on the 1919 religious education program, advised that children and youth had participated in such events as a church picnic, a sleigh-ride and a gathering for the purpose of enjoying a Christmas tree. In his report, the superintendent makes no mention of precautions like masks, physical distancing, or hand washing. Today we would lay stress on such precautions, and we might not even allow an indoor gathering of children and youth around a Christmas tree.

In January of 1920, a supper was prepared and served at the church. This does not seem like something we would do today.

In her report on the activities of the Women's Alliance for 1920, the secretary of this group noted that

Alliance meetings had been held regularly with attendees at these meetings averaging between 30 and 40 persons. Today, we would be more cautious about the advisability of meetings of this size.

In 1920, the Men's Club sponsored regular Saturday evening meetings as well as a number of Sunday evening forums on the subject of Unitarianism. Today we would be hesitant about holding such in-person gatherings.

Notwithstanding all the differences in our congregational approaches to the Spanish Flu of a century ago and the COVID-19 pandemic today, one similarity does seem to stand out: we are doing much of what our congregants did then, but we are doing it via Zoom.

I hope the above remarks have been informative from a historical perspective.

*In 1999, Jean Ahmed self-published her book: *So Far—So Good!: A Chronology of 100 Years of Unitarianism in Ottawa*. There is one page for each year in the life of our congregation, devoted to significant events of that year, spanning from 1898 through to 1998. Copies of Jean's book are available in the adult lending library in the Lounge.

~ respectfully submitted by Brian Cowan, Archives Volunteer

For those wishing further information about the Spanish Flu, go to following links:

<https://kitchissippi.com/2020/04/05/quick-to-act-how-ottawa-quelled-the-spanish-flu-in-1918/>

<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/a-century-ago-the-spanish-lady-came-to-ottawa-claiming-more-than-500-lives>

How Work for the FirstU Staff has Changed During the Pandemic

Gareth Auden-Hole **Sound and Light Coordinator**

Back in March I was forced to cancel what was to be a busy summer for my singer-songwriter alter-ego, Jack Pine. I also began a hiatus from my work at FirstU. I have pivoted back to my first passion as a recording engineer, and am performing a few online concerts, including [this one for the NAC](#). Since returning to FirstU in September I'm focused on implementing brand new live-streaming technology for Sunday services and other events at FirstU, while also supporting the further development of the congregation's online offerings. I'm keeping the long term in mind and am enjoying my expanding new role at the church. I'm excited for the congregation to see this new tech in action when we eventually go live from 30 Cleary.

Rev. Ellen Bell **Community Minister**

The pandemic has changed my work life significantly. As the Spiritual Care Visitor, my role was to "visit" people in their homes, residences or hospitals. Since COVID-19, personal visiting indoors has not been permitted.

I have visited occasionally outside, being socially distanced, of course. But mostly, my visits have been exchanged with phone calls. While with this option, I can connect with

folks, it is certainly not my preferred choice. I have never been especially fond of using the telephone so it is a bit of a struggle for me. I have been dealing with some intermittent health issues as well; nothing serious – mostly just annoying (and not COVID!) but they have slowed me down a bit.

Jen Brennan **Operations Manager**

Working from home has been quite comfortable, and my work has definitely changed. I've tried to successfully support staff and monitor the campus from afar as much as possible. Scheduled rentals had to be cancelled and appeals made to renters to return after the pandemic.

Zoom bookings have replaced room bookings. There are more meetings and they are sometimes quite long as folks revel in every opportunity to connect, even if on-screen. The call for improving communication is as important as it has ever been and we are working on that via the Communications and Outreach Committee.

I've spent many hours learning everything COVID: creating protocols, information posters, screening and waiver forms; consulting our insurance provider, public health, and being part of the new 'FirstU COVID

Task Force' of Staff and Board members making recommendations to the Board.

I am extremely grateful that my family and friends have remained healthy and my (adult) children are flourishing despite the changes the pandemic has made in their lives.

Lori Clark, Facility Manager and **Moe Harkat, Custodian**

As there were no room set-ups or rentals to look after, Lori and Moe have kept busy taking extra care of the grounds this past summer, and they have never looked more kempt.

Although not in regular use, the building must continue to receive its share of tender loving care to ensure all runs as expected.

In consultation with the Property Team and Jen, they have been working on a list of indoor tasks such as staining baseboards, stripping and polishing; shampooing carpets; the sort of tasks that are hard to do when scheduling around a busy building.

Our long-time weekend custodian, Kevin, has taken on more hours at his other job as a result of the pandemic. Perhaps he will join us on staff again in the future.

... continued on page 14

From the book Braiding Sweetgrass...

In Potawatomi, the strawberry is "ode min" the heart berry." A precious and delicious gift from the Earth. A gift expressing a deep love.



***A huge thanks to all the
FirstU Staff who support this
beloved community***

How Work for the FirstU Staff has Changed During the Pandemic, *cont...*

Michelle Jackson **Finance and HR Manager**

In March 2020 when we shut down, we probably all thought this pandemic wouldn't last this long. I didn't think much would change for my responsibilities at FirstU; finances are finances after all. The truth of the matter is that I have been busier than any other time in my role at FirstU. Daily tasks and responsibilities remained stable although processes for much of it changed. Losing the help of two office volunteers has made an impact on my time. In addition to my regular full-time job, I have become the in-house expert on government subsidies.¹

I, as well as several other senior staff members working from home are just lifting up our heads now to realize summer is gone, Christmas is approaching, and then the end of the year. The last eight months were just a blink.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for the notes I receive from you; it is so nice to open mail and find a note saying "hi and miss you". A few of you caught me off guard and happy tears have rolled at the thoughtfulness. I miss seeing all your beautiful faces in person. This year has been hard on so many people and it's your kindness and generosity of spirit that fuels the community for which you all should be so proud.

March 2021 will be very different for me as I put on a new hat. I will become a grandmother! This is exciting and makes me so very happy. In a time when we are losing so many lives to the pandemic, my family will be truly blessed by adding a new life.

Deirdre Kellerman **Music Director**

Since the pandemic, my job as Music Director has changed from that of 'conductor' to 'audio/visual engineer'! Our three choirs have transitioned to online rehearsals, with regular recording projects that you can hear in our services. Rehearsals are very different from what we're used to; singers must be muted due to lag, and I can't hear anyone (though they can hear me). Singers record themselves at home and I merge these recordings together. Throughout the summer and fall, I've also been putting together our weekly services. I'm thankful to still be making music (in new ways) with the other choirs I work with: *Hypatia's Voice Women's Choir*, the *Ottawa Choral Society*, and as of this fall, *Tone Cluster – Quite a Queer Choir*. I also got married in September!



Neo Yaxley **Director of Religious Exploration**

Since the pandemic hit, I have been arranging outdoor activities for families; understandably, many were not comfortable meeting in a group. I continue planning lessons and preparing the story for our Sunday service. It has been an enjoyable challenge finding the perfect story to connect with the service.

Recently, I surveyed families to see whether they would be interested in starting in-person Sunday programming within public health guidelines. At this point, families have opted for virtual and outdoor meet ups. Accordingly, we continue community building with the children and youth through virtual sessions. The biggest change for me is not going to FirstU. I miss chats with congregants and staff. I am learning to adapt to working from home, which has its own blessings and challenges.

On a more personal note, my son and I have spent time outdoors virtually every day. My young son Eriksun and I love nature, so we went to the beach as much as possible and did several hiking excursions in the Gatineau hills. This summer was special for us as I taught him how to ride a bicycle. He misses the church, and although it has decreased over time, he still asks to go to church with his friends.

¹ The initiatives of the Federal Government to help all Canadians during the pandemic has brought forth various subsidies. The Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) has been the most supportive for FirstU. This subsidy and its parameters periodically change, making it a moving target. But this Federal program, in the first 6 months of the shutdown, supported up to 75% of our wages. The program has slowly been decreasing in the last 2 months and will be available until June 2021. Michelle continues to monitor and apply for available subsidies.

Fall Fair Auction

Usually in December, Fall Fair is already behind us, but in this COVID year everything is different, isn't it? Our regular grand congregational bazaar in November couldn't go ahead, and we all missed the happy church-transforming preparations, the bustling sale day and the much-anticipated announcement of the fundraising total. We hope to carry on with that tradition next year, of course, but in the meantime... welcome to the first (annual?) Fall Fair online auction!

We're excited about this event and hope you will be too, because support from our congregation and others in the community is what will make it a success. You can learn more about the auction in the Qs and As below:

Q: What is the basic idea?

A: We're taking donations of suitable higher-value items, which will be sold through a local auction company as a fundraiser for our congregation. By partnering with professional auctioneers, we benefit from their expertise and large bidding audience. And those treasures from your pandemic paring down can find a new home and help FirstU as well.

Q: When is the online auction happening?

A: We have already started accepting donations, and the online auction will be held early in 2021.

Q: What kinds of donations are you looking for and how will I know if mine are suitable?

A: Examples of what sells well in this type of auction are collectibles of various kinds, gold and silver, jewellery, military memorabilia, artwork, vintage clothing, small solid wood (especially teak) furniture items, and selected coins and stamps.



Simply send a short description and, if possible, a photo of your item so that the auctioneers can do a pre-evaluation. If they think the item is a good fit for the sale, the team will arrange with you for delivery to the church or pick-up from your home.

Q: Can this activity be done safely during COVID?

A: Yes! Strict safety protocols will be adhered to, pre-approved items will be received by arrangement and donors will not enter the church.



Q: How do I contact the auction team with questions or items to offer?

A: We're glad you asked! Please contact us by email at: fallfairauction@firstunitarianottawa.ca.

We look forward to hearing from you. And don't forget to spread the word!

Thank you,

~ Carol Card, Fall Fair Director

Here are some articles we have accepted for the auction:





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