

FIRST UNITARIAN
CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY
BR  **KLYN**
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

Transforming Lives

Paige Carlson

(Member since March 26, 2017)



I moved to NYC six years ago for a dream first job in publishing. My very first Sunday in the city I sat in that pew. The next Sunday I joined the choir and First Unitarian has been one of my homes ever since. I'm lucky because a few years later, my shiny new life in NYC started to crumble; my severe depression and anxiety disorder became overwhelming.

I was gripped by constant panic attacks. Suicidal thoughts invading, becoming persistent, and by the time I finally listened to my doctors and went on Disability, I was up to twelve panic attacks in a single morning, clocking my heart rate in the 160s simply sitting at my desk.

That year I shut down almost completely. I didn't leave the apartment for weeks at a time. If I showered and cooked dinner in a day, that was a good day.

But First U continued to support me. I was welcome here, even though I couldn't come every week. You helped pull me through the darkest weeks. The music that I heard and helped make here, helped push me back towards the light. I was supported to not just push through the pain, but to find a better way. To find my voice.

I sang in choir and gave sermons during the summer. While in the past I never would have spoken publicly about my anxiety and depression, I began to feel called to say it out loud.

To let people know that the put together face they see next to them may be struggling with something they can't see.

Your familiar voices gave me the bravery to do and say things I was too afraid to say, and be, aloud before.

So here is something else I have never been public about:

From my grandmother dreaming Kennedy's assassination the night of his inauguration to my mother saving my sister's life because of a dream, the idea of prophetic vision, of connection to something, has

been personal in my family. As a writer, I experience this as ideas that come to me in dreams, waking me up and sending me running for pen and paper. I experience a 'flow state' where the words seem to flow through me from somewhere else, recording what the Muses whisper.

Because First Unitarian has given me a home, and you have given me the bravery to have a public voice, to embrace my gifts where they come, and to survive the darkness. For all those reasons you have transformed my life.

So here's where I really go off script:

Because about a week before Meagan asked me to do this testimonial, I was woken from my sleep by the same inspiration that sparks my writing, only this time with the chorus to a song, fully formed, from wherever these things come from. Call it God, Muses, call it Neurobiology, Psychology, Chance, whatever it is - First Unitarian gave me the voice to share it with you.

So I am going to sing it through one time, and then if you feel moved to you will join in

Song

Well, I'm trying to be the flame,
But the darkness has it's game:
Always shifting, forging shame,
But I'm trying to be the flame.

We are trying to be the flame.

February 24, 2019