



Transforming Lives

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(Moving Toward Membership)

Hello everyone! I began attending First Unitarian in January of this year. I was born, raised, and still live in Queens, the largest and most ethnically diverse borough. My childhood memories consist of wandering industrial Long Island City, eating sushi and spring rolls in Flushing, hanging out with my friends in Elmhurst, and going home to Ridgewood.

I still go home to Ridgewood. I'm still in regular contact with many of the people I grew up with. The landscape of New York is in my DNA.

But parallel to the liberal city that I grew up in, I was indoctrinated into very conservative and dogmatic religious system. I was raised as a Pentecostal, a charismatic strain of evangelicalism that places heavy emphasis on what they claim to be direct experiences with god. It was a church where: speaking in tongues was the norm, where watching the adults around me screaming and falling in heaps on the floor was the norm, and where things like exorcisms were the norm.

It was a place where LGBTQIA people were reviled as abominations. As a member of that community, that absolutely destroyed me. I tried closing the door to that side of myself and when I found I could not, it felt like my only other option was to close the door to my spiritual self.

So I did. I slammed it shut, bolted it, and refused to look in the direction of that door for many years. I couldn't deal with the thought that the creator of the universe hated me, and over time that pain calcified into disbelief. This wasn't the genuine disbelief held by atheists; rather, it was the desire for there to be nothing, because if there was nothing then my heartbreak couldn't exist, either.

But as superficial as my disbelief was, it did empower me to learn about the faith of my childhood, from an academic and historical perspective. The only way to make peace with the things that scare us is to hold them up to the light, and the higher I held the demons of my childhood, the more illuminated the world around me became.

I noticed the Earth, and the magnificent improbability that we, and all that we needed to survive, would spring forth from her. I noticed the sky, burning blue into forever, a vast infinity that rendered my existence both irrelevant and a small miracle onto itself. I noticed the sun, just another star in space but also, our all-important source of life. I noticed the moon, how she leaves and comes back, and leaves... and comes back. And how everything in our world works just like that, together in that harmonious cycle. How could that be called anything other than *divinity*?

Faith is a diamond—there are many different facets to it, but no single perspective captures the entire picture. They all hold a grain of truth. I thought I was alone in that belief, but looking out now, I see an entire congregation that was built upon that ideal. Here at First Unitarian I see polytheists and monotheists, skeptics and believers, LGBTQIA people and our allies together in celebration of the lifelong journey of mind and spirit. What we have here is a reflection of what I'd like the world to become.

I re-opened the door to my spiritual self. Thank you all for giving me the courage to walk through it.

First Unitarian changed my life; Together, we can change the world.

September 22, 2019