

Why I am a UU, by Kris [redacted], January 17, 2010

April 4, 1968, while seeking to assist a garbage workers' strike in Memphis

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction....The chain reaction of evil--hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars--must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength To Love*, 1963.

Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

I. Intro

After preparing for today, I came across the talk I gave in 2002 on the same topic. Much is similar, but my reasons for being a UU have deepened since then.

One example is that last time my reasoning was based more on a rejection of organized religions and the fact that I didn't fit into their box, and couldn't follow their recipes.

Now my reasoning is that I believe the Divine is big to be contained solely within any one religion—even UU. Through UU I've grown to believe each of the world's religions and great writings is an attempt to honor a universal truth that includes love and unity, and is much bigger than the human spirit is able to comprehend. I understand that UU's are the people who pray, "To whom it may concern."

My upbringing, experiences, and personality are what have drawn me to this faith community. I'll give you an abbreviated version of my background, and then end with why I remain a UU.

My childhood experiences with religion include influences from my father, grandfather on my dad's side, and the Baptist church. My father found answers in his rebellion against organized religion in parapsychology, Edgar Kaycee books, Margarte White's Unobstructed Universe. He'd welcome the

door-to door missionaries in and fill them with his version of truth for hours on end. The only ones that returned were the newly appointed ministers to our Baptist church who were sure they could save my dad. None of them ever did.

Mom took us kids to the Baptist church, which was closest to where we lived. During vacation bible school when I was 10 or 11 years old, I gave in to all the pressure to become baptized. I was sure that as soon as I took the holy plunge I would hear God talking directly to me like everyone else said he did..... It didn't happen. After awhile, with no audible voice from God, it seemed to me that the baptismal was just an insurance policy for heaven, but then again maybe there wasn't a heaven because I was starting to be unsure of God. I began watching church members with a critical eye, and came to the conclusion that the guilt, the message that there's only one way to god, and the rules of the church were sales tactics to build a following and in no way represented a godforce I wanted to believe in. At this point it would have been such a blessing to have known there was such a faith such as UU.

After trying to learn about other religions on my own, and not getting very far, I gave up on religion. I found more meaning in Science and Art and Nature than I ever did in church.

At the same time I became more aware of my Grandfather's beliefs. My Grandfather became a fundamentalist in reaction to Catholicism—he always talked about the Romans, and their evils, and I finally figured out that these Romans were the Catholics. He knew the Bible inside out literally, and though a good person, was very sad. In his later years he succumbed to scams by so-called Christian ministers who prey upon the old, poor, and lonely using religion and guilt and sent much of his pension to them instead of using it for his own health needs. Needless to say, I didn't gain a very high opinion about religion from this, either.

In going to college, I wanted my life to count in a big way in making the world a better place. I was a very lost soul for a period—not tuned in to the God Spirit because I had rejected it with organized religion. I couldn't decide on

a major, I didn't have faith in a greater power, I was trying to solve major life questions. A friend invited me to participate Social Action work with an interfaith college group satisfied my need to help others.

Through this I became aware that there were Christian religions whose ministers read other things than the Bible, and whose service was more hands-on than simply raising money for missionary work, and so I decided to explore other churches. I visited a variety and learned quickly to sign a fake name on the guest card so I wouldn't become a victim to be saved. None were for me.

I gained a great deal of spiritual knowledge from a literature courses taught by the best Shakespeare professor in the world at U of MT—I took every literature class that he taught—the underlying theme, looking back, was the unifying theme of love, as well as the fallibility and humanity of man. In one of our private conversations about meaning, Dr. King introduced me to Victor Frankel's book, Man's Search for Meaning. Frankel, as many of you know, was a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp. His theme was that if one has a why to live, one can live with any how (condition). Through this and other readings, and my deep connection with the natural world, I decided again that there is an overall guiding good, or God, and I wouldn't let any religion affect my spirituality.

My personality has a lot to do with the reason I'm a UU...

I love the arts and the sciences, and see lots of meaning in both; I'm eclectic—and like to learn from many different sources; I tend to be rational but rebel against being so rational that feeling and awe and mystery are discounted, and I like to question and discuss the big issues of life. In fact, Bill and I spent our first date together in an intense discussion about religion.

Bill and I were lucky to find the Uu group here in Sheridan together, and discovered that we were both Unitarian Universalists at heart. Previous to this, I had no clue there was such a faith community. I continued attending because the members walked "the talk".

I continue to be a part of the UU community because I can unreservedly accept the key principals. It provides me with belonging—grounding—security.

I find belonging in this community because questioning is ok, it's encouraged.

We are free to explore, question, wonder why, and find inspiration from many sources. In UU, no one claims to have all the answers—we are all seekers growing in spirit and wisdom.

Our focus is not on getting to heaven, it's on doing good works to help others and our planet. Social action is compassion in action. This faith community provided me with strength to take on issues that compromised my employment, and supported me in a great time of stress. For this I am eternally grateful.

With UU, I can feel that my whole life is spiritually integrated—not disjoint—ascribing to certain principles on Sunday, which don't seem to fit the rest of the week. There is no fundamental conflict between faith and knowledge, science and religion, the sacred and the secular, since they all have their source in the same reality.

And finally, it's ok for me to attend my other church on alternate Sundays—the Church of the Great Outdoors where I feel most in touch with Spirit.