



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

“Monks on the Move”

© by Rosemary Woodel & Marguerite Holmes

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Centering Thoughts:

One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things. Henry Miller

What we find outside ourselves has to be inside ourselves for us to find it. Pico Iyer

If you go there expecting Burger King and McDonald's, you're not going to have a good time.
Marguerite Holmes

Call to Worship:

Rosemary: Pico Iyer, a contemporary travel writer, wrote that “travel can be a kind of monasticism on the move: On the road, we often live more simply (even when staying in a luxury hotel), with no more possessions than we can carry, and surrendering ourselves to chance.” This service includes stories of the wonderful things that can happen with that surrendering. Marguerite and I share joyful adventures and two which were not complete bliss. With an open heart, you can have an adventure anywhere on this lovely planet of ours.

Together Time:

Marguerite: Here's what happens to me when I get lost: I get scared, and the first thing that happens when I get scared is that a whole herd of yahbuts and whatifs come crowding into my head: What if I never find my way home? What if a bear eats me? What if no one knows where I am and they forget me? What if I starve? If someone else tells me I'll be OK, then the yahbuts start in: Yahbut you don't know how mad my mom will be; she might be glad I'm gone. Yahbut what if everyone else gets found but me?

These unpleasant critters love to sneak into your mind when you are afraid and make you MORE afraid until you are so confused you really don't know what to do! The reason they do this is because they feed on fear. They make you more afraid so they'll have more to eat. Good for them. Not so good for us.

Luckily they are cowards and don't like their own medicine. They will run away if you look them straight in the eye and say, “Yahbut I'm not being eaten by a bear now. Whatif I ask someone for help? OR, when there is no one around who could help, I can say, “Yahbut I'm a smart person. Whatif I think of the next best thing to do here and now? – like get out of the rain if it is raining on me. Then I can think of what I need to do next. Answering your own non-scary yahbuts and whatifs step by step leads you right out of the place of the fear and TA DA soon you won't be scared any more.

Reflections, Part One:

Rosemary: Go to Uganda?! No way! But I've learned to trust the Universe (which I sometimes call God). It can offer me unplanned adventures which test my strength and courage. I met Rev. Mark Kiyimba, a UU minister in Kampala Uganda, at the Unitarian church in Richmond, England when I was visiting my sister. After the service I invited Mark to visit me and the UUFA if he ever came to the southern United States. The Universe spoke.

Sometime later I got a phone call — from Uganda. "I'm coming for an AIDS workshop next week," he said. Goodness!

I picked up Mark in Marietta one week later. Some of you met him during that first visit. He taught our drum circle a Bagandan song.

When he was saying goodbye, he said, "You must come to Uganda and see our church, our large school, and our orphanage for children with AIDS." While I can be an intrepid traveler I could not envision pulling off a trip like that.

The Universe spoke again. A few months later *UU World* (the Unitarian Universalist Association's magazine) advertised a trip that the UUA and the UU Service Committee were jointly sponsoring — to Uganda. So I signed up. While we did eventually visit Mark's church, school and orphanage, we spent more time in Ocholiland in northern Uganda. This is where Joseph Kony terrorized villages by kidnapping young people for the Lord's Revolutionary Army. We were there to witness, and to receive thanks for UU funds that were used to buy goats and pay a lawyer. The lawyer — Jackie, a delightful woman from Kenya — helped rescued girls (now women) who were being returned to their villages. Our service partners, Ugandan social workers from the Catholic group, Caritas, were our escorts and teachers of history and culture.

As our van approached Gulu, I heard — and then saw — a dancing parade come toward us. "They'll lead us to the village." I jumped out of the van and danced with them down the dusty road. After a generous dinner (which we praised), groups of dancers entertained us.

When a group of "elderly" (my age) women danced, I asked a nearby guide whether it would be all right for me to join them. "Absolutely," she said.

The women, dressed in white and blue, opened up the circle. I copied their steps. (It's harder than you'd think.) It was loads of fun. Villagers were smiling and outright laughing. Later on, a smiling Caritas worker explained that by dancing I advertised that I was looking for a husband.

I felt that I had, for a few hours, become part of this Ugandan community. I hope I showed that I respected who they were. The Universe provided this learning opportunity in a part of the world I never would have experienced. I am so glad I had the willingness to accept it.

Marguerite:

Twelve days ago I was happily digging up weeds from my garden when I heard a trumpet on my street! Since I live on a quiet neighborhood street, this is not a common sound to hear. When I looked up the street . . . What to my wondering eyes should appear but a little boy about 5 years old who could have been Christopher Robin! He was playing a drum made out of an upside down tin flowerpot. Behind him was his big brother of about 9 or 10. Someone had given him a REAL trumpet (not a toy). Though he had not learned how to breathe so he could keep a song going on the trumpet, he had learned how to make real musical notes that he played one at a time. In other words, he was not just making BLAAATY noises like I might make if I tried to play the trumpet.

I could tell that he was imagining himself as a prize-winning trumpet player as he strutted down the street behind his little brother. Behind the trumpeter was Grandma pulling a red wagon with a one-year old child in it. At the very end was the mother of the children.

When they passed me, I told them that theirs was the BEST parade that had ever been on this street

and I have lived on this street 48 years! Christopher Robin showed me how he could play the “Mississippi” rhythm on his drum (Mis-si-sip-pee he demonstrated.), and then he exclaimed, “Today! This very day, is my baby brother’s FIRST birthday! He is one year old! We are giving him a parade for his birthday!”

I told him I thought that was the best present I’ve ever heard of! He was eager to get on with his parade, so I waved them on their way. My only regret about this charming moment is that I did not think quickly enough to ask if I could join the parade. I’m sure they would have let me.

Reflections, Part Two (*a dialog between Rosemary & Marguerite*):

Rosemary: Please do not take literally the words (*from the Chalice Choir’s anthem, presented just before this part of the service*) about “never more to roam.” Roaming can be restful but, sometimes, roaming can be quite challenging, like our glacier walk in Iceland.

Marguerite: I’ll say. Much of that walk was sheer terror.

Rosemary: How so?

Marguerite: I thought walking on a glacier would be like walking on packed snow — not much of a problem. On TV, glaciers don’t look as HIGH as they are, nor did I consider that to get to the top we’d have to put bear traps on our boots.

Rosemary: Oh yes, the clampons. Our guide warned us to walk like a duck with our feet apart on the ice. I never could get the hang of that. I fell down three or four times. Tricky getting up on an ice cube.

Marguerite: Well who knew that walking on a glacier was like walking on a giant ice cube with a 60 mph wind trying to blow you into unseen crevasses that went down all the way to the center of the earth?

Rosemary: Center of the earth? But was that really scarier than when I unexpectedly had to drive in Ireland? Me, who never wanted to drive on the wrong side of the road?

Marguerite: Maybe not. That was a real hair-raising experience!

Rosemary: I was so scared of driving into an on-coming lorry on those skinny roads that I got as close to the hedges as possible. Then our gigantic BMW began beeping because the branches touched the fancy car. More than once I just stopped driving till the lorry passed.

Marguerite: That didn’t bother me nearly as much as the Mother of all roundabouts we had to negotiate on returning that car! Going 65 mph on Atlanta’s Spaghetti Junction, made instead of multi-level 8-lane roundabouts, with direction signs two stories tall, and me having no idea how to read the signs much less answer you when you screamed, “Where should we go?”

I was sitting in the back. What did I know? I did close my eyes in anticipation of certain death and to this day have no idea how we made it in one piece to the Dublin airport.

Rosemary: Yes, I actually yelled quite a bit. It’s a testimony to their forgiving hearts that Marguerite, Judy and Roseann still speak to me.

Marguerite: Au Contraire!! We are eternally grateful that you somehow engaged the leprechauns to create a miracle and get us alive to that airport!

Rosemary: Well that boat captain in Croatia told us that “God takes care of drunks and small children.” Clearly the Universe takes care of terrified Americans driving on Irish roads, too.

Meditation:

Marguerite: A few weeks ago the choir sang a song entitled “The Silence and the Song” that

pointed out that all songs begin and end in silence. Our days are like a song: they all begin and end in the silence of sleep. If the point of a song or of a day were to get to a destination, the day or the song would be useless. Luckily that is not the point: It is all about being changed by the magic, the music, In-Between the beginning and ending silence. The wonder is that we all experience the In-Between magic and the music uniquely and differently. The singer has a different experience than does the listener. Sometimes we focus on the singing and at others on the listening. Sometimes the journey has scary yahbuts and whatifs, and sometimes it has dancing and parades.

Let us spend a few moments in silent meditation thinking about the time when someone else's life song gave us great joy. Then consider how our own life song has given someone else joy. For it is the possibility for having joy that is at the heart of music, magic, and adventure.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. Is there something you regret not having done because a yahbut or whatif sapped all your courage to do something new? How does that regret affect you?
2. Is there someone you know or know of whose life song inspires you? Who? Why? How?
3. What could you do that would be your own theme and variation of that person's inspiration? Explain.