



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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

“Growing in Community”

© by Kelli A. McConnell, Coordinator of Religious Exploration

Reflections delivered on May 20, 2018

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts:

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. William Butler Yeats

A child's life is like a piece of paper on which every person leaves a mark. Chinese Proverb

*Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community
and the world better than you found it.* Marian Wright Edelman

Sermon:

(This Sermon followed a Bridging Ceremony for two members of the Youth Group and a Senior Graduation Recognition Ceremony)

Life is a journey of continual learning and growth...I can see that so clearly as we offer Liam to the world-at-large, and as Kole and Luke level up to Middle School. These rites of passage are significant, and I am grateful that we have carved out space to honor them this morning.

As I stand here before you, I too am a testament to the continual learning and growth that this being human offers us.

A year ago, I stood on shaky knees and couldn't sleep a wink the night before my infamous Oompa-Loompa solo and yet, today almost a year-to-the-day later, here I am... held fast by the knowledge and experience that I have gained over the past year. Here I am, standing on the foundation that this congregation has so lovingly cultivated for me. And I gotta say, that feels really good.

The rites of passage that mark our learning and growth are largely emphasized in our younger lives...but as we get older and we leave high school or post-graduate studies behind, it seems like the world forgets to honor the growth that we experience. Without milestones or symbolic markers laid out for the passage of time, it becomes normal to stop encouraging all the ways that we grow as adults.

We often forget to celebrate our growth...or perhaps we are just not encouraged to examine where

and how we have pushed ourselves to arc past our own limitations. Maybe you've tried something new even though you were scared, or perhaps you took up learning a new skill, or maybe you pushed yourself towards greater maturity by choosing to have a courageous conversation. Big and small, it is essential that we acknowledge and honor the growth that we are undergoing at every stage of life.

Recently I have been thinking about how I didn't necessarily ask for this...and like I said, a year ago I would have fainted on the floor if you had told me I would have to write this sermon and get up here – eyeball to eyeball with all of you. But, the reason I have been able to step into this opportunity and show up right now in this way, is because I was given a chance to *grow into it*.

This congregation, the RE Team, all the volunteers...Reverend Alison and Amber... every person who has ever offered me an encouraging word or a pat on the back – you are the reason I am able to stand here today without too much anxiety, and express what this congregation and the RE Program means to me.

I have no doubt at all that my heart lead me straight to UUFA – well, Shaye is actually the one who brought me here...she sent me the job description and in all caps she said, YOU MUST APPLY...

I feel strongly that Shaye was an agent of my heart. She called me to this congregation so that my gifts could come to life more fully and so that I could understand a little bit more about my fundamental purpose on this planet. Sometimes, we are pushed onto a trajectory of evolution that we can neither resist nor deny – my discovering UUFA was a lot like that. Perhaps you can relate.

Once I arrived here, much like a tiny baby seedling, I was planted in the soil of the RE Program, which had been enriched with lots of care and intention by those who came before me. And, I was tended so sweetly by the most loving host of gardeners in those early seedling days. I was given enough room to grow at my own pace, and I was sheltered by those who had grown before me here – the ones who knew the ins and outs of things and where everything in the supply closets lived, and those people helped me find my way, so that now I can bloom.

All of these allowances were crucial in my growth over the past year and the lessons do not fall lightly on me. In turn, I hope to bring this same energy into the RE Program. It is my intention to nurture the hearts and minds of our younger UUs by staying open and receptive to their needs in this changing world. I want to really *see* the children in this fellowship and ask them –maybe with words, maybe by observing – what they need most to feel safe and well as they grow in their own search for truth, meaning and connection in their lives.

So, this morning as we are called to celebrate the RE program, I want to also celebrate all of you in this fellowship who have cultivated a space where RE can thrive! Without your support, this program wouldn't exist. Thank you also for seeing me and for trusting me with the righteous job of tending to *your* seedlings.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. How have you grown over the past year?
2. In what ways does your community support your personal growth?
3. What were your favorite summertime activities as a child? Do you find ways to enjoy those same activities now or can you share them with a young person in your life?