

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

*You must understand the whole
of life, not just one little part of it.
That is why you must read, that
is why you must look at the
skies, that is why you must sing,
and dance, and write poems and
suffer and understand, for all
that is life.*

- J. Krishnamurti

I am one of those unusual Unitarian Universalists who have grown up with the faith and remained. My card carrying Humanist parents raised me in a small Unitarian fellowship in Newark, Delaware. My father reports that an early age I revealed my freethinking nature by demanding "do myself." I learned about Jesus the Carpenter's Son from Sophia Lyon Fahs. I fell in love for the first time at Murray Grove junior high summer camp, looking for bats in Thomas Potter's church. I was one of the first kids who took the About Your Sexuality curriculum. The smell of mildew reminds me of church rummage sales. And I'll always treasure my

memories of the glorious June church picnics with softball, hay rides, and fresh corn and watermelons on the Brown's farm, owned by a man who built his own tractors from used auto parts.

From an early age I've claimed the Unitarian Universalist identity as my own. One of my strengths as a U.U. minister comes from this many leveled experiential understanding of what it is to be part of our association. Who I am has gradually been explored and revealed while singing hymns and listening to minister's preach.

As research on identical twins is revealing, who we are is linked to our genes. I am continually surprised when I visit my father to discover "me" in him. I will catch myself in a gesture or verbal expression suddenly realizing it wasn't Sam talking but rather Conrad. So in this spirit of appreciation of Conrad Trumbore, my father, and Jean Foight, my mother, the search for who I am must really begin with them.

CALVIN & HOBBS



LOOK AT THESE UNSOLVED PROBLEMS. HERE'S A NUMBER IN MORTAL COMBAT WITH ANOTHER. ONE OF THEM IS GOING TO GET SUBTRACTED, BUT WHY? HOW? WHAT WILL BE LEFT OF HIM?



IF I ANSWERED THESE, IT WOULD KILL THE SUSPENSE. IT WOULD RESOLVE THE CONFLICT AND TURN INTRIGUING POSSIBILITIES INTO BORING OL' FACTS.



I NEVER REALLY THOUGHT ABOUT THE LITERARY QUALITIES OF MATH.





Jean Foight (in front) with her family

My father, Conrad Trumbore, was the son of a traveling office products salesman and a generous, Socialist leaning, establishment bashing, FDR Democrat mother who was raised in Mechanicsburg, a small town outside Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The Trumbores are mostly found in the ranks of farmers, steel workers and merchants in Eastern Pennsylvania, descended from the original Trumbauers invited to settle there by William Penn in the early 1700's. My grandmother's family are closely knit kin from Eastern Shore Maryland who trace themselves back to the Pusey clan in England for 600 years.

Conrad received his PhD in physical chemistry from Penn State in 1955, the same year he married my mother, Jean, who finished her

degree in home economics. Jean was the daughter of Clarence, a civil engineer in Pittsburgh who traced his family tree back to George Washington so he could join the Sons of the American Revolution and Mabel Love, a woman who hailed from West Virginia who died when Jean was a young teenager. Conrad and Jean began their marriage steaming for Holland where my father had accepted an appointment as a Fulbright Scholar for a year to study the emerging field of radiation chemistry. It was there on a cheerful spring day inspired by two frolicking amorous dogs that Samuel Alan Trumbore was conceived.

I was named for two men. The first was a Quaker friend of my father's named A'delbert Samson. An emotional, tall, gangly fellow with an irreverent hilarious wit, my father met him while "Sam" was studying rural sociology at Penn State. (Conrad was active in the Unitarian student union at Penn State which sometimes met with the Quakers.) The second was a warm, gregarious, friendly man named Sam Street who married Conrad's cousin Ruth. Sam had been a bomber pilot in World War II. One year after returning from the war and flying for Eastern, he took a plane off for a trip and didn't come back. He has been in and out of mental hospitals ever since.

The circumstances of my childhood were a reflection of the 50's and 60's. My father worked as a professor of physical chemistry at the University of Delaware and my mother raised us. As soon as my younger sister Susan and I were in school, my mother returned to school herself to study library science, following her bliss, her love of books. A champion of the changing roles of women, she led the way for other women to enter the professional world of men. In 1972, Jean ran for representative in the Delaware legislature. Conrad was chairman of the local Democratic district and active in the movement for peace in Viet Nam. I grew up in a family which valued books, learning, ideas and political action.

My early memories of growing up are very pleasant. Our home bordered an undeveloped wooded drainage basin which was my playground. I excelled in school, and counted girls with the boys among my friends from the beginning. I participated in cub scouts, softball leagues, summer day camps, choir and 4-H, in the genteel lifestyle of the small college town.

In 1968, my father was granted a sabbatical year in England and took the family with him. My sister and I were enrolled in the "private" school of a small town in Surrey for a year. We learned first hand what it was like to

be a foreigner and adapt to a new culture. The beginning was not easy, but I soon picked up an accent and made some friends. Although I struggled with English History and multiplying pounds, shillings and pence, it was an introduction to the school's printing press which sparked my interest in writing, graphic arts and computers.

Readjusting upon our return in 1969 was difficult because I was behind in school and my friends had been entering adolescence without me. There was a new tension with my girlfriends and a new competitiveness with my boyfriends. Things seemed to deteriorate as we all entered junior high.

I began missing a lot of school in the fall of my eighth grade year with flu-like symptoms which my doctor couldn't diagnose. My mother fretted that something was wrong with me and insisted on discovering the reason. One trip into the hospital for tests was



HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO APPRECIATE NATURE.

inconclusive. After a few months a second trip was scheduled. I remember the interns accusing my hyper-responsible mother of malnourishing me because of my emaciated condition. The room in which I was lodged looked out over a graveyard; I speculated that it might not be long before I was planted there. The pleasant suburban wrapper came off my life as I began to gaze into death's hard eyes. I experienced a desolation that is usually reserved for the very old.

The doctors diagnosed me with Crohn's disease using exploratory surgery and took out my appendix as a bonus. The pain of the surgery was eased by the joy of having a name and a treatment. Although Crohn's is a chronic disease with a poor prognosis, I had come through the ordeal with an intense desire to choose life. I continued to have intestinal problems through high school but responded well to the anti-inflammatory medications. I returned to school resolved to catch up in my work and make something of myself. Yet knowing what I knew of the suffering of the human condition, I began to be dissatisfied with the pleasures of childhood. I developed a restlessness and a strong desire to understand the meaning of life. What made the potential suffering which shadowed our footsteps bearable?

My high school years were good. I became involved in the chess team playing 5th board with an undefeated season in our senior year. I also produced and starred in my own television show. Some background: Newark High had gotten its own cable channel as part of the requirement that cable television channels have some kind of public access. We put out programming every evening, of which one of the shows was my show, "Interface: Politics." I and a panel of high school students interviewed local politicians and candidates for office. We interviewed the governor, senators and our representative to Congress. Although I enjoyed television production and being a star, I was more interested in electronics. I was fascinated by watching our student engineer, Bob Armstrong, disassembling and repairing the television cameras. I wanted to know how they worked.

After graduating from high school, I decided to enter the University of Delaware. As I look back on it, this was probably a mistake. But I had scored lower on my SAT than many of my honors friends, which discouraged me as I considered applying to any but the local schools. I was also concerned that I didn't want to put my parents into debt. Since they both worked for the University of Delaware and I would be living at home, my education costs were very low.

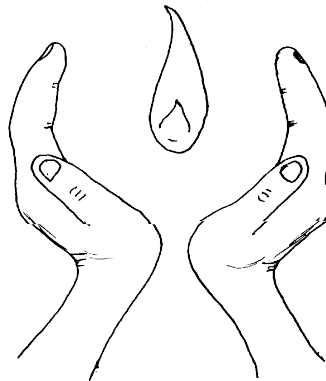
My first semester studying electrical engineering required a course in numerical methods. We were instructed to use computers to solve some of these problems. It was love at first sight! Evenings and weekends became devoted to learning about programming and writing computer games. I remember one which simulated a race course for rats through a maze. My skill was recognized and I soon got a part-time job as a computer consultant for the University. During the summer I worked as a technician testing and repairing gas chromatography integrators for Hewlett Packard.

By the fall of my junior year I was quite busy - maybe too busy. Something inside me wasn't being fed and was starving. The questions that arose during my illness were still there but were buried under computer printouts. I'm not sure just why, but while eating dinner alone at a steak house and overhearing a conversation about traveling, I decided to drop out of college and make a pilgrimage to the West Coast. Today my decision might have been called "burn out". Then it was a decision to jump off the edge of my well ordered world. I didn't know where I was going or why I was going but knew I needed to go. I bought an Amtrak rail pass

and, waving good-bye to my family, I hopped aboard.

My trip across the country landed me in Palo Alto, California, the home of Hewlett Packard. I was a "corporate groupie" back then having worked for HP as a summer hire and hoped to get full-time work. After interviewing several places, I landed a job repairing computer circuit boards with HP.

Looking for a way to connect with others like myself, I found the Palo Alto Unitarian Church the first Sunday I spent in California. I remember recording in my travel journal how at home I immediately felt singing hymns from the blue hymnal. I became a regular attendee and started a student group reaching out to Stanford students. I was elated that I was building a new life in Silicon Valley! Until I was hit by a car.



Physical trauma was not left back in Delaware. Riding my moped to work, I was hit by a car going 35 miles an hour and thrown across a six-lane intersection 95 feet. The only significant injury I sustained was a badly broken leg which took another three years to fully heal. Another three years living each day with the frailty of human existence.

HP held my job to which I returned after a trip home for Christmas. I enjoyed the work but soon realized that to advance in the company I would need a degree. I applied to the University of California at Berkeley to finish my education and was accepted. The day I was accepted, I had no other dream than becoming a computer engineer for HP.

Looking back, I wish I had stopped in Berkeley when I first came to California. Moving to Berkeley was a delight for a transplanted easterner. The architecture, the liberal, socially progressive atmosphere, the good public transportation, and the Graduate Theological Union made me feel like I had found my home. A Starr King student, Brendan Hadash, had started a student group for U.U. UCB students the year I arrived and I, like my father, became quite active.

Two years had passed since my leg was broken and I was still having problems with it. Before I had moved to Berkeley to finish my engineering degree, I had the metal plate in my leg removed because the bones had grown back together. What I didn't know until I saw the doctor on campus was that it had re-broken after the surgery. With only student health insurance, I was facing the possibility of a bone marrow transplant. The problems



of this body would not let me forget my mortality.

The doctor and I decided the best course of action would be to see if it would heal by itself with the support of a leg brace. I entered my third year of healing not knowing if there would be an end in sight, and the possible loss of the leg.

In this climate of uncertainty a tremendous event occurred which changed the direction of my life (for all the details, see the included sermon called "If You Build It ..."). After winning a chess match I felt sure I would lose, I had an experience of opening to a truth about life I had never experienced. I experienced a sense transpersonal love, of agape, of grace which

opened my eyes to a whole new experience of being that February evening in 1980.

Hearing the "call" and deciding to answer it were two different spiritual events for me. I was in the middle of my engineering education at a major university. This was no time for religious quests! So I finished my degree while exploring my inner life as I had the time. I remember talking with the soon to be Reverend Hadash about the possibilities of going to seminary or doing ministry with him in Canada. I wasn't ready.



Before I had graduated, I found a part time job with North Star Computers writing test programs for computer circuit boards. After searching up and down the West Coast and getting a few job offers, I decided to remain with North Star which was growing very fast and seemed likely to become a dominant force in the personal computer market. My years with North Star were quite an education in the business cycle of boom and bust. The first two years saw tremendous growth and expansion followed by years of decline and then bankruptcy. I began as a test engineer then

moved to being a group leader, then over to software development and then to managing a group of programmers. I worked hard to help North Star succeed and was rewarded for it. Unfortunately IBM pulled the rug out from under us and the company was never able to recover.

During these years at North Star, I had begun to sample the smorgasbord of spiritual teachings in the San Francisco Bay area. I spent 9 months studying psychic healing which may have helped heal my broken leg. I began to pay attention to my diet and stress and found I could control my Crohn's disease very effectively keeping it in remission. The healing group connected me with the American Sufi community (S.I.R.S) where I further explored and validated my experience of transpersonal love. Finally I connected through the recommendation of a friend with a Buddhist Insight meditation teacher. I realized from that moment I had found the spiritual practice I had been looking for.

Vipassana or Insight meditation cultivates awareness of moment to moment experience using the breath as an anchor in the present moment. No deities are to be praised, nor any magic formulas used to gain spiritual power. It was utterly simple and direct. And it promised experiential answers for the suffering of human existence. The Buddha claimed there was a

way to bring suffering to an end through the cultivation of wisdom.

Yet how to connect this with Unitarian Universalism? I had been raised on a version of Humanism which had no word for Spirituality. My somewhat mystical experiences didn't seem to fit with my humanistic understanding of U.U.ism.

During this time I had become involved in the First Unitarian Church of Oakland with its new extension minister, Rev. Robert Eller-Isaacs. His vision of worship and spiritual community which he brought alive in the church's sanctuary stirred inspiration in me that the two might come together.

Not until I had been offered a test engineering job with HP to do what I had originally gone to UC Berkeley to learn did I realize that I was now ready to answer the call. I turned down the job offer and began my application to Starr King School for the Ministry.

My years in seminary were a joy. I was introduced to theologians who further validated and expanded my understanding that came after playing that religious game of chess. I studied Buddhist Christian dialogue finding yet more connections. Looking back on Unitarian history, I discovered the writings of the Transcendentalists, the original Unitarian malcontents

looking for more spiritual emotion in their intellectual religion. The love for humanity I found in Hosea Ballou inspired my compassion. I began to see the larger picture of the liberal religious quest; seeing the universality of many religious ideas bound by tradition and seeing the disconnection and loss of identity that happens when tradition is abandoned.

I jumped at the opportunity to do my internship in Rochester, New York at the First Unitarian Church. Now I would have the chance to test the integration I was finding in seminary in a "real world" congregation. Thankfully, it all went very well in the year I spent there. While I was there, I met my wife, Philomena, through her minister Rev. Carl Thitchener of Williamsville, New York, near Buffalo

Philomena and I were married four months after I graduated from Starr King in the fall of 1989.



"Of course I hope to find gold. But my real goal is spiritual growth and inner peace."

Because of the desire to be near family and Philomena's age, we decided to delay my search for a congregation until after we became parents – which fortunately didn't take very long. Andrew William was born May 26, 1992.

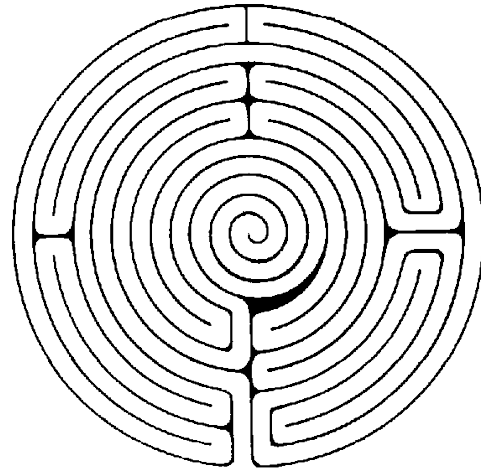
After we got our feet on the ground parenting, I was ready for the ministerial search.

Unfortunately I got in the game a little late and had my name sent out to only a few congregations. One from Florida looking for their first full-time minister responded with interest in me. Curious but cautious, I accepted the invitation to come down and precandidate. The omens were not good as the Buffalo Airport was closed by a heavy snow storm the day I was scheduled to fly down. The search committee was still interested in seeing me so I flew down midweek and preached to the search committee. While I wasn't too excited about living in Florida or in a retirement community, I liked the people I met and sensed a compatibility. Philomena was more than happy to leave Buffalo behind for the sun belt.

The Port Charlotte Fellowship has been a wonderful place for a first settlement. The congregation, while financially strapped, has good, committed leadership and congregational supporters. I've had a chance to solidify my strengths and work on my deficiencies rounding out my ministerial skills. The

congregation has grown, pledge income has come up and the congregation is now committed to ministerial leadership.

Philomena has loved Florida. She found work as a medical social worker and therapist for four different companies doing home



health visits and psychotherapy. Andy has grown into a healthy, intelligent, sociable child who just entered the first grade.

This is just the barest outline of the highlights of my life. It lays out the major landmarks yet misses so much of the fascinating detail. I don't have space to describe Philomena's work with the Grove's Foundation which is trying to build a retreat center in Southwestern Florida. My work with the Fellowship is described in greater detail in the "Action" section.

Suffice it to say, our years in Florida have been good ones and we are ready for a new challenge!