

Remembering Our Dead
Sunday, October 30, 2022
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Rev. Cynthia Snavelly

In the Western part of the Christian tradition November 2 is All Souls' Day on which all the faithful dead are remembered. November 1 is All Saints' Day or All Hallows on which all the saints of the church are honored. That makes October 31 All Hallows Eve or Halloween. Mexicans make a major holiday of this time that some say includes traditions originating with the Aztecs. Altars for the dead are erected in homes and may include the deceased's favorite food, drink and things. Picnics are taken to cemeteries. There are skulls made out of sugar and bread decorated with the shapes of bones. For pagans this time is one of the cross quarters of the year called Samhain. It is the pagan new year. In their book, Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions Starhawk, Diane Baker and Anne Hill write, "In ancient times, Samhain was believed to be the time when the veil was thin between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Our ancestors could return to visit us, to give help and advice. People set out lights in hollowed-out turnips to guide the spirits of the dead, and put out food as an offering....In my (Starhawk's) house, at Samhain we make a big family altar. On it we put symbols of the season, such as pumpkins, pomegranates, fallen leaves and gourds. We also put there pictures of our beloved dead and things that remind us of them. I always bring out my Aunt Frieda's miniature blown-glass piano, and a long braid of my grandmother's hair that she kept when she bobbed it back in the 1920s."

My family never celebrated All Souls' Day or the Day of the Dead or Samhain, but when I was home to Pennsylvania in July I went to the cemetery where much of my family is buried. By my father's grave my sister had placed a decorative yard stake topped with a miniature of one of my father's favorite things, a John Deere tractor.

This congregation has lost several people in the recent past. Today let us remember the eight who died in the last year and one who died before this year began but whose memorial service was held this year. I did not know any of these people well having only been here a year myself. I will leave more time today for shared reflections so that you might share remembrances of these people yourselves. Mike Donato died January 13, 2021, but his memorial service was held this past April. His stone in the memorial garden says, "Beloved husband, father and grandfather, a Unitarian Universalist who led by example." Al Solberg passed away this year. For eight years Al served Tri UU as the choir director. He spent many hours during the summers searching for just the right songs for the choir. He and Phyllis Sharpe made an excellent team. Those of you who sang under Al's direction know that he was a stickler for timing. His stone in the memorial garden says, "His song lives on." Rev. Mary Louise DeWolf was the first person this congregation ordained into the Unitarian Universalist ministry. At her memorial service a piece she herself had written after her husband's death was read. From Mary Louise DeWolf's book A Cracker Gal Finds Religion: A Life Journey Through Stories, Poems and Sermons, "I wanted to save every piece of paper – letters, pictures, mementos of places visited, Of honors won, of family, school, and growing up, Sermon notes, and programs with his name. Then I came across packets of other people's sermons He had been given for ideas and inspiration, Sermons of preachers long since dead. I read a page of one or two and thought, these are beautiful. How does one save all this beauty? It should not be destroyed but enjoyed again and again. And then I thought, how could I know all this beauty If I did not read it all? It's too much. And if I saved it, how could I ever find what I wanted even if I knew it was

there? And then I thought, this is only a drop in the ocean of human experience In which human beings have created works of beauty for thousands of years. Where does all the beauty go That is not saved in a library or museum? Not only the beauty in print and form and sound, But the beauty of sunrise or sunset that is experienced and never painted, The peace of the autumn woods or the soothing, rippling waters of the sea, The beauty of friendship, the intimate and tender moments shared by lovers, Or the fervor of a crowd inspired by message and common purpose. Where does all the beauty go? I searched my soul for answers. I asked my friends, but would not take their answers. I would find my own soul's answer. And then it came to me. Where does all the beauty go? It goes into us. We are the museum, the library, the computer, Only it's more than that, for it does not emerge in the same form again. The human spirit continually creates more and different beauty. That's what forever is – the creation of beauty, Our own individual, special kind of beauty, Which may be shared with one or many, now or years later. Where does all the beauty go? In a sense it doesn't matter, for creativity is forever. And so, what will I save of my husband's things? Some now to look at, to touch, to remember, Some later to give to his son, the book he wrote will go to those of wider acquaintance, And perhaps to a library or two. But in the end it does not matter, For the beauty of his soul and laughter is in all of us who knew him, Whether we remember it or not. His beauty is now a part of that great generative matrix. From which more beauty will flow. Where does all the beauty go? Why, into the creation of more beauty. The true savoring comes not with the object, but with the experience, Whether it is of color, or form, or sound, or friendship, or intimate moment. Where does all the beauty go? I know that answer. Now on to the next question.”

Another TriUU member Phil Lindsley also died this past year. His obituary read in part,

“After college, Phil moved to Miami where he began his 37 year law enforcement career with the Dade County Public Safety Department (precursor to Miami Dade Police Department). During his first five years as a patrolman, he became a charter member of that department's Under Water Recovery Team. In 1963, Phil was promoted to detective sergeant where he remained until 1965 when he was hired as a Special Agent of the U.S. Secret Service and assigned to their Miami Field Office....During his Secret Service career, Phil completed over 10 years of protection related duties and received two director's awards: one related to a bond forgery investigation and another related to a protective intelligence (threat) investigation. Phil was a member of the Association of Former Agents of the U.S. Secret Service (AFAUSSS) and enjoyed attending their reunions throughout the U.S.”

TriUU member Tom Connors obituary read, “Thomas Joseph Connors sailed away from this world on January 4, 2022 at the age of 89. He is navigating to other ports of call among the stars where the peace of his big heart and gentle smile are needed. Left to mourn his loss is his wife Lorraine, together forty three years, six surviving children, eleven grandchildren and three great grandchildren. Tom joined the Navy at age 19 and served with pride in the Korean War for 5 years. He worked as an IBEW Union electrician until his retirement. In his fifties he went to Queens College night school and graduated with a Bachelor Degree in Political Science and Communications. He was a long-time HAM Radio Operator and, as a member of the Lions Club, provided diabetes and eye testing. He worked with CERT and took First Responder classes for Advanced First Aid as well. His last great interest in life was recipe hunting and cooking. He wanted no one hungry and gave generously to the food pantry.” HI wife Lorraine who met him at Queens College ended his obituary with, “In his memory, please give to feed the hungry. It would touch his big heart and make him smile.”

On TriUU member Muriel Bingley a piece from 2016 in the TriUU Biography book says, "Muriel is most proud of getting her degree from Ohio State. She started there when her oldest daughter was in first grade. She says she 'was ...really focused and really wanted the degree.' Muriel notes that going back to school totally changed her life. She taught for 13 years specializing on working with children with learning disabilities and behavior disorders." The windows here at the front of the chalice room were a gift to the congregation from Muriel.

A former member of Tri- County who had moved away, Eleanor Strickland died suddenly this year. Her obituary stated that, "Eleanor spent much of her working life at IT companies in Minnesota. Eventually she was President and CEO of her own company EMS Software Development. Even in her retirement Eleanor remained involved with computer science and developed web pages for private companies and nonprofit organizations.

"In 2003 Eleanor moved to The Villages. Here she was active in a number of community organizations, especially the Democratic Club and TRI UU ... where she served as Treasurer. She was active in the Life Long Learning College where she especially enjoyed Great Books classes and classes in women's history. She was a treasured member of Trivia teams and continued to display her artistic talent in her paintings and other aspects of the visual arts."

Finally, this year Susan Ashley died, making her own choice on the timing. Her stone in the memorial garden, that she placed, is dated 2020 so she kept on longer than she may have originally anticipated. I can say little about her. I know Bill and Andrea are fostering her beloved cat Aria until it is rehomed. Her memorial stone says, "I did it my way."

Mike, Tom, Phil, Mary Louise, Al, Eleanor, Muriel, Susan. These are TriUU's recent dead. You may have family and friends you have lost that you also remember. After the singing of the hymn and introduction of guests I invite you to use our shared reflections time to share briefly something about one of our or your beloved dead. We remember them and, in that way, they continue with us.