

Many of you know Lynn as a choir member and church board secretary. She is also Dave Keen's wife and Noah and Leah's mom. You may not know that she has a Ph.D. in political science from Johns Hopkins University, and held a career position in both the Carter and Reagan administrations. She followed that with stints in arts administration and computer database consulting. For the last 16 years, she has worked at Unisys Corporation (across the street) in various management positions, most recently as a Program Manager for Microsoft Operating Systems. This morning she will be telling her about her spiritual journey that led her to membership in our congregation: "Close Encounters of the UU Kind."

It all began with the cutest, smartest boy in Mrs. Brissey's fifth grade class. Kirby MacLauren. On the playground one day, I asked him what religion he was. He said he was Unitarian but they had merged with the Universalists. I countered that the Methodist church had recently merged with another denomination and our sign now read "United Methodist Church." Sadly, this did not give us enough in common to sustain a long lasting relationship, so I admired Kirby from afar until he left for the Baltimore School for the Arts and was never heard from again. But this was my first encounter with what appeared to be an exotic religious denomination.

Growing up in suburban Baltimore in the 60's, everyone seemed to be something—Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist. But we weren't. We weren't anything. My mother's family was Lithuanian Catholic, but they settled in a tiny town in Pennsylvania without a parish. So they sort of went to the nearby Lutheran Church. In contrast, no one in my father's family seemed to ever have gone to any church or even thought about religion. They told me that Great Aunt Ellen was thought to have been a Quaker, but as a child that didn't give me much guidance.

So early on, I began asking people what religion they were. And frequently I would ask them why. It looked to me that people were born to a religion, although that didn't seem very logical. I thought it made more sense to learn about all the religions there were and then pick the one that suited me best. But nobody I knew seemed to have done that. And in fact, it didn't seem like people had even thought much about what religion they were or why. The most devout person I knew in high school explained it to me this way, "You might as well believe, because then you'll go to heaven. If it's not true, then it won't matter." But that didn't seem to me like the way it should work.

So my parents didn't attend any services but sent my brother and me to the closest church, the Methodist one a few blocks away. One Sunday, they changed the order of the children's service and instead

of going to the combined age service, my brother thought it was over and walked home—and was too embarrassed to go back, so he didn't. And my parents didn't make him. I kept at it because I enjoyed the singing and the ritual, and I figured one day it was all going to make sense. In my Junior year of high school, my friends turned out to be all different religions. So we decided to take turns going to one another's churches—Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, and Mennonite. Our Mennonite friend was not allowed to come to our services, but we could go to his—and as you can imagine, we were the only visitors. It seemed pretty similar to other services, except for the a cappella singing (an organ would be too fancy). And when the pastor said, "Let us pray," we all dutifully bowed our heads, but everyone else stood up, and turned around to face the back of the church, knelt on the floor, and rested their elbows on the pew. So hastily we did the same. We realized later that our friend couldn't have warned us, because he'd never gone to any other type of service.

These brief religious encounters continued with the Born Again Christians at Maryland All State Chorus and even briefer encounters with Scientologists on the street corners of Washington, DC. But when they lopped the stone cross off the 100 year old chapel at my "formerly" Methodist college so they could get public funding, I was just about done with religion altogether. So I got busy building my career and except for an occasional wedding didn't think about church or religion much at all.

But I did miss the singing. By then, I had moved to the Twin Cities. One winter I was lamenting that I had no place to sing Christmas carols. So a friend at work invited several of us to the White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church. I remember it as an eclectic service—some Kwanzaa drumming, some Hanukah songs, and some carols—sung in Norwegian. Finally Santa Lucia came down the aisle with her head ablaze. It was intriguing, but not intriguing enough for me to give up my Sunday mornings.

I could have probably gone on that way indefinitely, except for two events: the birth of my children and the death of my father. My father had no association with any religious organization his entire life and had never expressed any beliefs one way or another that I was aware

of. So at his funeral, it was disconcerting to have a minister-for-hire impute a belief system to my father that never existed, and to mispronounce his name. I didn't know what I wanted as far as a spiritual community went, but I knew I wanted something more authentic than that.

And the second event is what enlivens the religious quest in many of us--the difficulty of raising children in a morally challenged society. Especially, one made more difficult by the pristine affluence that pervades our daily lives here in South Orange County. It became apparent that a few family-based service projects weren't enough to be perceived as more than "stuff Mom makes us do." So I needed to find a church. Based on family religious tradition, I went to the nearest one to our home, Lutheran as it turned out. But it didn't feel right. I looked in the Yellow Pages and found the Unitarian churches listed there. I looked up the UUCSC web site and liked what I saw. And because this church was slightly bigger than the Laguna Beach one, I chose to come here so I wouldn't stick out so much. I came by myself a couple of Sundays and one week I brought the children. I liked the service and the message from the pulpit and the people. But the RE program was really small. The choir was on hiatus. And I just couldn't get beyond the green shag carpet.

So I bought some books of children's bible stories and tried to home school religion, unsuccessfully.

One day I was reading the Utne Reader (for those of you unfamiliar with the magazine, it's like the Reader's Digest of the Alternative Press). In a sidebar, it mentioned a web site called Beliefnet.com. This site supposedly promoted all religions and even had a Belief-o-Matic quiz that would tell you what religion you were. Finally, there was a way to figure out what I was! So I answered 20 questions on what I believed— about the afterlife, characteristics of a supreme being, why is there suffering in the world, and so on. And it came out that I was 100% Unitarian Universalist. So I had Dave take the quiz, too. And his result was the same. So here was our answer. I went back to the web page and saw that Reverend Anne was in the pulpit with interesting sermon topics. I dragged myself out of bed on Sunday and was very impressed with the changes. There was new carpet, new chairs, a reactivated choir, a larger RE program, and lots

of new energy. So I came back with the kids, and then I said to Dave that it really wasn't going to work if he didn't come, too. So he did.

It took four encounters for me to really find Unitarian Universalism. But what do I believe? I was always envious of people who were so sure of their beliefs—that Jesus Christ was their Savior, that the Virgin birth happened, that the sacraments were real. I knew I didn't want those beliefs, but I wanted their certainty about believing in something. And I wanted it in a context I was comfortable with. I remember coming home and telling Dave: "They don't pray—unless they want to. They don't sing Amen at the end of hymns. The hymns all have new words. It's a democracy. The sermons sound like college lectures, but are way more interesting. It's the best of all the world's religions." And every service I attended validated my impressions and I found even more to like. Competent, caring, friendly, and sometimes fascinating, people. Dozens of people all working together doing hundreds of tasks that make possible this evolving, dynamic spiritual community--a community that I am proud to be part of. And most of all, it's a community whose values I share, and it doesn't matter that I'm not really sure what I believe.

One thing I do believe is that there are hundreds more parents like me nearby searching for a spiritual community just like this to reinforce a set of values for their families—values of tolerance, understanding, integrity, and peace. I am so thankful that this congregation exists to help my children explore their spiritual beliefs in a way I never could.

Three years ago, I did no volunteer work at all. Now I have to ration my volunteer commitments. We've got an even busier family calendar full of board meetings, committee meetings, and fun fundraisers. Events like the upcoming service auction and then all the fun dinners and sing-alongs we successfully bid on. But we've given up some things. No more prime time TV. Fewer movies. Some sleep. The garden goes unweeded. And the quilt remains incomplete. And I do miss those lazy Sunday mornings. But in their place I've got UUCSC--worth getting up for on Sunday mornings.

Thank you.