When I Joined UUFSCC…

By Jennifer Choate

I entered the Fellowship in 1987, baby in my belly and new job at Kaiser Santa Clara waiting. My beloved father-in-law, Bill Wood, who has since passed away and was a member both in Riverside and here, led the family here mostly for the social activism aspects. And there was social activism.

Woody and I met in Chicago where I did my residency at Northwestern and he worked at US Steel. UUism was a big thing we had in common, and we married at First Church of Chicago in Hyde Park by Rev. Duke Gray on June 4, 1983. I was a refugee from patriarchal, superstitious Episcopalianism who felt a need for community when I moved back to Chicago in 1981, and suspected UUism would be a better fit for one evolving from existential atheism, looking for meaning and hope. In Santa Cruz we had a secondary motivation to educate our children about religion.

That placed me as a young mother as an obvious volunteer for the Children's RE program which was being amazingly led by Ann McCrow and Sarah Albertson, to be a teacher for what then had at least three age groups, babies, young children 3-7 and older children 8-12. After that the kids tended not to want to continue unless there were really interesting programs like Coming of Age or OWL (Our Whole Lives), but there will be more about these later.

I was excited by many things here in the late '80's. The Social Action under Rev. MacMillan, his interesting sermons which I hated to miss when I was leading RE, the music under Carl Hunter, dream work which was introduce by the UU Rev. Jeremy Taylor at a retreat followed by weekly dream groups in the sanctuary, an interest I have maintained ever since, a woman's group that grew out of the support for member Bea Koeppel who I wish I had met that met off site in people's homes, a book group monthly in people's homes and even the controversies, most notably about Rev. Dave and whether we should even have a minister at all. The congregation consisted of many characters, all of them earnest and many became dear friends and correspondents.

I went on to volunteer for committees and leadership position such as the Long Range Planning Committee which I participated in for a full ten years under the late Dave Boone. We feared it would collapse if we ever left, and it did, but Dave left architectural plans some of which have been realized, some not yet.

I was on Nominating Committees, Growth Committees, Committee on Ministry later on Shared Ministry, the Board and two Search Committees, the latter of which were the most intense and meaningful ones led by Bruce Fihe.

Now I am one of the senior members like the ones I recall when I joined such as the Edgertons, Helen Eidemiller, the Krafts, the Dwyers, Joe Bryans, Jeff and Carol Rudisill, the Newmans, the Blues and the Hunters.

The Fellowship has endured a lot of change. Members come and go, the children's program did not survive Covid, Trump's 2024 reelection brought us many new members, our minister is remote, but Social Justice lives on not as one but as two committees, Social Justice and the Green Team. I had a short stint leading Adult RE, and now I lead a new Book Group and this History Project to update the history brilliantly documented by Wendy Edgerton, From these Beginnings, UUism in Santa Cruz, CA from 1866 to 1986.