



# UU ORIGINAL VOICES

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Grand  
Traverse  
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## A Collection of Our Writings



### My Mom's Toothpicks

Assembled, on the ready,  
Props for the glitter and magic:  
Swizzle sticks, maraschino cherries,  
Polished toothpicks, embossed napkins.  
Prepped for the party to remember  
Ready to conjure the old happy days to rise again.

Alas, my mother's plans lacked critical mass.  
It took decades for the cherries to go bad.  
The swizzle sticks and yellowed napkins got thrown out.  
But the toothpicks' plain utility allowed them to enjoy  
A surprisingly long collective life.  
Their ranks dwindled, but the survivors hung together  
Through many moves, many cupboards.

All the estate now dispersed,  
To family, strangers, landfill.  
The last few toothpicks now rattle in their worn paper box.  
A fragile sarcophagus holding Mom's desiccated dreams.  
-The Northwoods Writrix



### Chess Champ Scouts Rivers

Sis pulls sweater around her shoulders  
stares at the Hudson from high in her townhouse  
scouts the meandering flow of her mind,  
while chess pawns rattled by the Metro-North line.  
Taps her laptop:  
*sandbagged-monks-in-khaka-  
guard-U.P.-monastery.* Thinks  
Michigan, the currents of siblings.

I jerk upright when iPhone flashes

texting my Manistee River retreat  
still drenched from taking a dip,  
attention snagged by Chess Champ.

My peace of mind, rooked by Reuters.  
Monastery, whaa?! Society of St John ?  
Skete in Keweenaw ?  
but she is gone before I focus.

Impatient always, already bored  
so emails our brother's Galaxy  
quotes The Guardian: *Clearwater-Seafoods  
-gives-Mi'kmaq-first-nation-fishing-deal.*

Ottawa River is flooding, he has a bucket  
underfoot  
but reads: *anti-bribery-rule-bungled-by-  
Ontario-lobbies.*

Abruptly he moves a bishop, then cross-  
checks,  
retorts: *win some...lose some.*

but Chess Champ has vanished.  
She wants a Kenyan chat, our sister there  
roasting figs with marlin, salt-water catch;  
Nairobi River tainted.

WhatsApp chimes with snippets, NY Times:  
*in-Kenya-cherished-fig-tree-gets-a-reprieve.*  
Hungrily that sibling considers castling,  
a quick-send pics of steaming figs

and fishermen with barracuda cooked  
crowding through door,  
then wogs a knight  
before Chess Champ can move.

C J Lee



### My Gratuities

As soon as I turn off the lamp, I begin;  
The list often starts with how grateful I am  
To be warm.

I'm grateful, every night for the companionship  
Of Honey, my sweet lab curled up beside me,  
Sometimes twitching in her dreams.

That I am comfortable, without pain when I lay  
down  
And that my mind works, and serves me well,  
My gratitude includes these and also, the rest of  
sleep.

My level of energy is sufficient for what I want to  
do  
I have things to do that are satisfying to me,  
And I am thankful for hands still able to work.

Hot showers are high on my Gratitude list,  
Hot and cold running water that is clean and  
indoors,  
Air to breathe that is fresh and sustaining. Thank  
you.

Friends care to know me and be known by me,  
Allowing us connections that even hold us up  
During the isolating year of a pandemic.

The garlic that grows in my neglected garden

And adds flavor to my soups this winter  
For the ease of cooking, indoors, without  
smoke...usually.

For the dependable patterns of nature that  
Bring the stillness and cold of winter, only to be  
Turned into pink lady slippers and loons calling.

The shiny spot somewhere across the lake, close to  
Omena  
That picks up the morning sun that I cannot see  
And announces the coming of a new day.

Sometimes I fall asleep before I finish my list of  
gratitudes.  
To sleep that easily is a blessing!  
And to wake to Honey's nose lifting my hand to pet  
her. Ah.

Two healthy sons and their healthy, thriving  
families.  
A sister and a niece and lots of cousins  
I'm grateful for family living and family still living  
in me.

Barbara Ann is safe in Tanzania, Lucy dreams of  
going to the  
Air Force Academy, and Eric still loves his work  
and play on his  
Computer. Ethan likes art, and Casey likes girls.

And I'm grateful for human tendencies toward  
kindness  
In a world dragged off course.  
I'm grateful we have examples of love winning.

December 6, 2020  
Mary Van Valin