

Sharing Stories

Since I have been writing this column for eleven months now, it is probably no surprise that I like stories—particularly everyone’s personal stories. I am delighted that this month’s Spiritual Enrichment theme is Story and I was happy this past Sunday to be put in a Breakout Room at Zoom coffee hour with the suggestion that we share our stories. With my cohort’s permission I share what we talked about.

Essjay Foulkrod started us off. She talked about her love for horses and told us that she would be going, just that afternoon, with an old friend from the Unitarian Church in Newton, MA, to visit with Mary Fulton and Betsy Cook and their horses, Rain and Penny, at Cherry Croft Farm in Shannock, RI.

Larry Kelland told us a few things about how he developed his love of and reverence for nature. He grew up with a wooded area behind his house, throughout which he was allowed to roam. He remembers it as a wonderful wilderness with views from atop “massive” rocks—that property has since been developed. He recalled being absolutely stunned with the distinctive markings on a butterfly.

Growing up in Glen Ridge, NJ, Barbara Beckwith also loved the outdoors. One of her early memories takes place in Alabama and is of finding a young acquaintance quite upset inside a chicken coop. The “big kids” of the neighborhood could often be quite mean and had likely bullied him into the enclosure. She doesn’t remember thinking she should help him out of the coop. Instead, Barbara joined him in the coop.

David Damon was eager to tell us about Daisy, the twenty-pound Cairn Terrier that both David and his partner Elaine dote on. Elaine likes to work in the garden and Daisy likes to join her. It turns out Daisy is very fond of green beans—only fresh off the vine will do, no canned or frozen beans for her. She will even dance on her hind legs in anticipation of this favorite meal!

Elaine Airozo told a dramatic story of having appendicitis at the tender age of seven years. She was incorrectly thought to have polio and was flying to Omaha, Nebraska with her family when she passed out. The pilot asked if there was a doctor in the house; there was not. Her father carried her off of the plane before it came to a full stop (!!! that is what this writer thinks she heard her say LOL) and she was then hospitalized for two weeks, during which time she felt like Madeline of picture book fame. Barbara chimed in with her own memory of a childhood acquaintance with polio and a story that somehow involved an Elvis look-a-like!

Elizabeth Donovan could relate to Larry’s story as she, too, had “wild” space to explore out of her back door. Space that included a large field and woods with a rock formation they referred to as the Indian cave. That place has also since been developed and perhaps was not quite as big in reality as it is in memory. Polio and nature brought an early memory to her of visiting Crotched Mountain, a rehabilitative hospital for children set in the beautiful mountains of New Hampshire. The family was there because her father was writing an article about the hospital

but it is the only memory she has of her family being together before her parents divorced. At under five years of age Elizabeth was profoundly affected by the challenges that the children faced and her mother comforted her with the story of the bluebird that visited each child, sitting on the windowsill and singing a happy song.

Essjay finished up by noting that our stories seemed to have a theme of appreciating nature and having grown up spending a lot of time outside. The woods meant a lot to her, too, and when she wasn't riding a horse, she was climbing a tree.

It was fun to share these small stories and to let one memory lead to thoughts of another!

Elizabeth Donovan, May 4, 2021