

**UU Castine Sermon 05/12/13**

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
CONGREGATION OF CASTINE  
May 12, 2013

James Fisher, PhD  
Senior Planner, Professor, Thespian

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS Delacroix Davis III

PRELUDE

OPENING WORDS

Words of Bruce A. Bode - Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

This is a resplendent new day that has been given to us.  
Let us then rejoice in it and be glad.  
And let us count our many, many blessings:

Let us be grateful for the incredible gift of life,  
And for the capacity to see, to feel, to hear, and to understand.  
Let us be grateful for this time of fellowship, for work to do,  
and service to render.

And let us then be especially grateful on this Mother's Day for the ties of love  
which bind us together, giving dignity, meaning, worth, and joy to all our days.

CHALICE LIGHTING

COVENANT (in unison)

We covenant with one another to listen to each other always with respect and empathy; to remain open to the views of others; to be attentive and attend without judgment; to provide an environment that allows each of us to be true to ourselves without fear of disapproval or reproach; to reach agreement in light of our shared expectations and experiences.

We covenant to support and sustain the spiritual, ethical, intellectual, and overall well being of our members.

Covenant is our practice with one another. We will each fall short at times, but we share the responsibility to bring us back into covenant gently when we stray.

\* HYMN No. 38, *Morning Has Broken*

---

## TIME FOR ALL AGES

**Who can tell me what makes this day special? It's the second Sunday in May.**

### **Mothers Day – Lanyards**

#### **Scoubidou**

The name **Scoubidou** originated in [France](#), where it became a [fad](#) in the late 1950s and has remained popular.

The name "Scoubidou" comes from the late French singer [Sacha Distel](#), who scored his first hit with the [song of the same name](#) in 1958. He copied the song from Peggy Lee who called it Apples, Peaches and Cherries.

**Boondoggle** comes from **woggle**, which is the knot use to keep your neckerchief on.

- Boondoggle has another meaning. Can anyone tell me what it might mean?
- Are there any boondoggles in Maine?

**Rex Lace** – maybe some guy named Rex wanted his name on the package, I don't know.

#### **Poopy Loopy**

**Gimp** is a narrow ornamental [trim](#) used in sewing or embroidery

**Lanyard** – something you can make for Mother's Day

---

**Anna Jarvis** first celebrated Mothers Day in 1908, when held a memorial for her mother in Grafton, West Virginia. She then began a campaign to make "Mother's Day" a recognized holiday in the United States. Although she was successful in 1914, she was already disappointed with its commercialization by the 1920s.

Anna's mother Ann Jarvis had founded Mothers' Day Work Clubs in five cities to improve sanitary and health conditions. The Mothers' Day Work Clubs also treated wounds, fed, and clothed both Union and Confederate soldiers with neutrality.

On May 12, 1907, two years after her mother's death, Anna held a memorial to her mother and thereafter embarked upon a campaign to make "Mother's Day" a recognized holiday. She succeeded in making this nationally recognized in 1914.

Anna Marie Jarvis never married and had no children.

**Julia Ward** (May 27, 1819 — October 17, 1910) was a prominent [American abolitionist](#), [social activist](#), [poet](#), and the author of "[The Battle Hymn of the Republic](#)". After the civil war she focused her activities on the causes of [pacifism](#) and [women's suffrage](#). In 1870 she wrote her [Mother's Day Proclamation](#). It was a "**Mother's Day for Peace**", asking women from the world to join for world's peace. In 1872, she asked that "Mother's Day" be celebrated on the 2nd of June.

I want you to think about weaving today, because we'll be talking about weaving here. If you have time, you might see whether you can weave a bit of Scoubidou for mother's day.

---

READING 5 *The Lanyard*, "Billy Collins

**"The Lanyard" - Billy Collins, the former Poet Laureate**

The other day I was ricocheting slowly  
off the blue walls of this room,  
moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano,  
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,  
when I found myself in the L section of the dictionary  
where my eyes fell upon the word lanyard.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist  
could send one into the past more suddenly —  
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp  
by a deep Adirondack lake  
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips  
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard  
or wear one, if that's what you did with them,  
but that did not keep me from crossing  
strand over strand again and again  
until I had made a boxy  
red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,  
and I gave her a lanyard.  
She nursed me in many a sick room,  
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,  
laid cold face-cloths on my forehead,  
and then led me out into the airy light  
and taught me to walk and swim,  
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.

Here are thousands of meals, she said,  
and here is clothing and a good education.  
And here is your lanyard, I replied,  
which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,  
strong legs, bones and teeth,  
and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,  
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.

And here, I wish to say to her now,  
is a smaller gift—not the worn truth

that you can never repay your mother,  
but the rueful admission that when she took  
the two-tone lanyard from my hand,  
I was as sure as a boy could be  
that this useless, worthless thing I wove  
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.

\* HYMN No. 99, *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*

## MEDITATION / PRAYER

### First Leap - Jim Fisher

Start with binoculars  
If you don't have a telescope  
Look as far as the aided eye can see  
Re-focus from near to far to near to far

Reach out to the edge of the galaxy  
The edge of your imagination  
Where the trail dissolves into wilderness  
Where your light particles have dispersed to a faint glow

There look for the faint glow of others  
Reaching out beyond their limits  
Leaving their rational selves  
And joining the universe of dreams

The soft, comingled light of uncertain futures  
Discomfort of abandoned doctrines  
No dogma star to guide you  
Ponder but a while, then leap.

## MUSICAL MEDITATION

### OFFERING

*Erik Walker Wikstrom* (My minister at the Yarmouth UU)

*Before:* It is said, “The Lord loves a cheerful giver,” yet we’ll accept from a grinch as well. As the ushers prepare to take this morning’s offering, may each of us look into not just our wallets or our checkbooks to see how much we have with us. Let us look into our hearts, as well, and see what is available there—how much love, how much generosity, how much faith, how much gratitude, how much hope—and let us take our offering from that account.

*After:* For the gifts which we have received—and the gifts which we, ourselves, are—may we be truly grateful. Yet more than that, may we be committed to using these gifts to make a difference in the world: to increase love and justice; to decrease hatred and oppression; to expand beloved community; to share, and to keep sharing, as long as ever we can. Amen.

**Source:** Association Sunday 2009

## OFFERTORY

\* DOXOLOGY (sung twice, in unison)

From you I receive, to you I give

Together we share, and from this we live.

## Sermon

I am so happy to join you in welcoming Allison and Rev. Charles Stephens,

According to the “Examiner”

<http://www.examiner.com/article/social-activist-charles-stephens-retires-from-ministry> (June 24, 2012)



Rev. Charles Stephens studied at the University of Culture and Creation Spirituality in Oakland, Calif., which teaches that wisdom springs from many faith traditions.

His first UU assignment was a summer placement in 1980 at a small congregation in Eastport, Maine. Like a lot of us, his life sojourn has required extended travels. Like many of us New Jersey or Ohio occupied a significant portion of our working lives.

According to reports in the Examiner Charles and his wife began their “retirement” as part-time stewards of the Scott and Helen Nearing [Good Life Center](#), in Harborside, Maine and now he will continue enjoying retirement as interim minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Castine. Congratulations to you all.

## Rapture

Blue Sky! A clarion call across the camp  
echoing through the spruce forests of downeast Maine  
Come and get it! Three girls and four boys crawl out of sleeping bags,  
kept tight overhead lest bats should tangle in our hair.  
Bucket Boys, get the buck-buck-buckets!

Scrambled eggs and bacon cooked on a wood stove.  
Mid-August, yet cold enough that the oldest takes his place  
By the stove and others arrange in pecking order  
Breakfast is served.

An hour's work building a fire, cooking and serving vanishes in minutes.  
Thanks mom. Bang, slams the door and as  
a mountain of dishes wait in the cast iron sink.  
What remarkable optimism  
to wake seven children ages 2 to 18 to breakfast with such cheery words.

Blue Sky!

---

## **Introduction to Human Ecology**

This was the opening of the memorial I delivered for my mother, who died last June, just shy of her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. It's a vignette, true enough, but colored my lifelong fascination with how things work.

As each of her seven ducklings, as we were known, left for college, we took our bag of talents, aspirations and generous parental support and set out to make our mark on the world. I was torn between music, engineering and the social sciences. This ambiguity of discipline has remained with me to this day.

Given the opportunity to return full time to Maine and study at Bowdoin College, I made peace with all that I wanted to do and focused on social sciences, particularly the relationship between population, the environment and development. Fortunately my family has provided me with vicarious stories filling in the gaps, with one son a mechanical engineer and the other a creative writer and Donna with her focus on the inner workings of the mind-body relationship.

I doubt that many of you are prepared to sit through a three hour lecture on my chosen field, and indeed three hours would not scratch the surface. Let me make the case this morning that among the many ways of understanding the evolving nature of motherhood is this somewhat obscure field called sociological human ecology. I'll go out on a dialectical limb and suggest that much of what we accept as gospel truth, even regarding mom and apple pie is more fluid and adaptive to our material circumstance, and indeed evolution is our best hope of survival.

## **Crystal Balls and Prognostications**

In the early 1950s Amos Hawley first coined the very useful acronym, POET, to represent a parsimonious arrangement of human and natural systems into Population, Organization, Environment and Technology.

I doubt he was considering motherhood specifically, but it's mother's day and I think the application can tell us much about where we have been and where we are heading. I'll save the application to apple pie for another time, preferably over desert. Population, Organization, Environment and Technology might

be the theoretical strands of a lanyard. They don't function separately, but are interwoven in complex patterns, each creating stresses on the others, requiring constant adaptation.

We can all agree that our country is redesigning our concept of family and motherhood, with dramatic changes taking root in the protest years of the 1960's. The trajectory of social change has been remarkably consistent, despite repeated efforts of reactionary groups to reverse the tide.

### **Population**

This first strand of the lanyard is perhaps the least difficult to grasp. Demographic or population events include birth, marriage, migration and death. Thinking then about motherhood...

In 1965 the average age of mothers at first birth in the US was 22, where it had been for some time. By 2009 the age had risen to 25. European age at first birth remains about 2 years older. The longer motherhood is delayed, the fewer children a mother is likely to have. Contraception has had an even more profound impact on birth rates, particularly birth rates within marriage. Motherhood, for many, is a choice. Unitarian Universalists have been on the front lines in advocating for conscientious freedom to choose motherhood.

One consequence of delayed marriage and childbirth is that in many advanced economies births have fallen below replacement, the number of births required to maintain the population. It turns out that Maine is close to European levels of reproduction, and if it isn't news to you, Hancock County has been below replacement for many years. In the 2010 census, average household size in Maine was 2.32 persons, putting us at 49<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states (we ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in 2000).

Our largest age cohorts are boomers, all well beyond child bearing years.

Hancock County is growing due to migration, but many of our migrants are retired, empty nest singles and couples. Our semblance to old Europe can and probably will change as we become a more culturally diverse state. In the absence of significant migration, we are likely to experience population decline.

Population patterns in much of the world are a stark contrast. The world population continues an exponential climb, fueled by reductions in mortality due to infectious disease accompanied by much slower reductions in birth rates. The population explosion is one driver contributing to unsustainable depletion of natural resources. Motherhood is at no risk of disappearing, but the global pattern is making a dramatic shift.

### **Organization**

Organization is by far the most difficult element of POET to grasp. Everything that we call culture, society and the economy, from building block institutions like the family to complex governmental and corporate bureaucracies falls under the rubric of organization.

The family has historically been the most basic institution of society. With very few exceptions, the process of raising children from birth to adulthood has been carried out in some form of family.

Marriage has served as an imperfect but nearly ubiquitous means for acknowledging and incentivizing stable parental relationships. Historically most motherhood has been framed by a stable partner relationship.

However, the institution of marriage is under stress, more so than motherhood itself. In the US 41% of births are to unmarried women, a trend in which we are trailing in the wake of rates exceeding 60% in some developed countries. Some of these births are to committed, stable couples that have chosen not to marry. A larger number of births outside of marriage appear to be less well planned, being concentrated particularly among younger women that are more likely become single parents living under significant financial and emotional stress.

Donna introduced me to the work of Christine Oppong in a research expedition we made to Cochabamba, Bolivia in 1988. Oppong is among many sociologist that have considered the role conflicts that confront women. She coauthored Seven roles of women: Impact of Education, Migration, and Employment on Ghanaian Mothers (1987) employing detailed interviews in rural and urban Ghana.

She observed that “all the interviewed groups saw childbirth as an essential role for women in society, either for the benefits it bestows upon the mother or for the honor it brings to her family. The security that procreation provided was greater in the case of rural and uneducated women. By contrast, the number of children per mother declined for women with post- elementary education and outside employment; with guaranteed incomes and little time at their disposal in their combined roles as mothers and employees, the desire to procreate declined.”<sup>[3]</sup>

We’re into pretty deep water here, with many, many models that seek to explain the choice of motherhood when it becomes a choice at all. It’s all about organization though. Oppong and others recognize that urbanization, education and employment opportunities for women all contribute to delayed marriage and lower birth rates. Oppong’s six other roles for women are more likely to conflict with child bearing with development.

The data also support “intergenerational exchange theory” in which the decision to bear children involves a very rough cost–benefit analysis. Individuals are motivated by other factors such as love, lust, security or insecurity to have children, but the larger societal pattern is clear. When the costs of having children are high and the downstream benefits of having adult children appear low, people have fewer children. In 1974, Dr. Karan Singh declared that “development is the best contraceptive” at the United Nations Population Conference in Bucharest.”

While conducting my doctoral field work in rural Bangladesh in the mid-1980’s, how the time does fly, I sought to balance my overtly statistical analysis of migration with local stories. Donna and I spent countless hours interviewing people of all ages about their life histories. Our limited abilities speaking Bengali and lack of familiarity with the culture no doubt left us more in the dark than we hoped, but some expression, local sayings came up frequently. On the question of intergenerational exchange, I often heard “Jodi oder na mile, amader ki diben?” If my children cannot make ends meet, what will they give me? Mothers, in particular, recognized that they could not depend on their children to support them and I think this was part of the widespread unmet demand for family planning services.



Another saying, not so often heard was “A woman’s heaven is beneath her husband’s feet.” This would appear in translation to be a doctrine of extreme paternalism. Before anyone runs me out of this lovely church, let me add that this statement was generally followed by “A son’s heaven is beneath his mother’s feet.” With the benefits of Google, something we didn’t have in 1984, it seems the first part of this saying has no basis in the Koran, but appears to be a colloquial expression in Bangladesh. The later part, “A Son’s heaven is beneath his mother’s feet”, does appear in an Islamic text or Hadith.

**The Hadith** (<http://www.soundvision.com/info/mothers/inquran&hadith.asp>)

- 1. The Prophet Muhammad said, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him: Your Heaven lies under the feet of your mother (Ahmad, Nasai).
- 2. A man came to the Prophet and said, ‘O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your father. (Bukhari, Muslim).
- <https://www.wvcommunities.org/so/blogs/can/Patenga/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=71>
- <http://www.soundvision.com/info/mothers/inquran&hadith.asp>

It is a bit prosaic, but the obligation of sons to mothers, where material means are available, is not a uniquely Christian notion.

Getting back to Maine, the dearth of births does not appear to be a consequence of advanced economic development or urbanization. Indeed we consistently land on the rural and lower economic development end of the spectrum, so the picture is indeed quite complicated.

A final thought about Organization and motherhood is drawn from the always intriguing work of Faith Popcorn. Even her name is intriguing. Faith Popcorn. ([www.faithpopcorn.com/](http://www.faithpopcorn.com/)) She has a gift for coining words that capture the imagination and in a loosely documented fashion capture social trends. Lately she has been focused on the ascendancy of women, coining terms like Single-arity, and she-change. Popcorn makes a number of predictions, including the already well documented rise of women in academics and the economy, the decline of marriage, the decline of traditionally male occupations.

Popcorn also predicts the further collapse of traditional marriage. Men will assume a greater share of responsibility for raising children, she predicts, as women’s earning potential overtake that of their male partners.

She concludes, “The SHE-CHANGE is exactly what society needs right now. We need to rely on compassion more than competition and innovation more than invasion. The introduction of this new feminine power into all aspects of our lives will bring about a new era of productivity and peace.”

We might reflect for a moment on excerpts from the **Mother's Day Proclamation of Unitarian Julia Ward Howe ~ 1870**

Arise, then, women of this day! Arise all women who have hearts, whether our baptism be that of water or of tears! Say firmly: "We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.

...

As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel. Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them then solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after their own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.

I think Julia Ward Howe hoped to see change (or she-change) come much sooner, but change is happening and women appear to be gaining important ground.

There is much more to be said about organization, but as my job at this moment is to speak and your job is to listen, and as I do not wish for you to finish your job before I finish mine, I will press on.

### **Environment and Technology**

The natural-environmental system is the third strand in our lanyard. This is the mothership, the planet, our Blue Boat if you like. Technology is the fourth strand. It represents our capacity to innovate, to create new tools for accomplishing our goals.

There is much to be said about the impacts of exponential population change and rapid increases in consumption on the natural environment. The wild caught population of fish is in free-fall, water supplies are over tapped and increasingly contaminated by reckless use of pesticides, toxic spills and mining operations. Our energy reserves are being depleted through waves of , and our sources of phosphates so essential to meeting the dietary needs of a hungry planet. We have altered the carbon balance through fossil fuel consumption to the point that our climate is changing and is displacing large populations either by drought, heat, floods and famine. But I digress.

Thomas Malthus foresaw the process of diminishing returns to agriculture as marginal lands came under the plow and soil fertility declined. He focused primarily on the dilemma of human population overwhelming the capacity of the earth to provide food. He did not foresee the technological advances in production, including chemical fertilizers and pesticides and more recently genetic engineering that would enable higher much higher reliability and productivity of agriculture. Malthus passed away in 1834, just as the seeds of the scientific and industrial revolution were about to sprout. The demographic transition was just starting and world population had reached 1.2 billion. We recently passed 7 billion and are likely to add another 1.2 billion in the next decade. Our robust environmental systems, aided by technological innovation have enabled most of us thus far to delay a time of widespread famine. How long we can do this is anything but certain.

I think Julia Ward Howe's vision of mothers' day, more than a recognition of motherhood, was a call to arms, or a call to dis-arm, a social movement led by women to end the ways of carnage. While working as a visiting professor at Bates College one of my students introduced me to the CHIPKO movement in Nepal. This was an effort by rural women to save trees that were a source of fuel and fodder and in Hinduism or endowed with spiritual power. Brave women joined hands around trees, a sit in if you like, to stop deforestation.

**Wangari Muta Maathai** who passed away in 2011) was a Kenyan environmental and political activist, with graduate degrees from the United States and Kenya. Her life story, like Julia Ward Howe, was a struggle to gain recognition for her work under difficult family and political circumstances. She ultimately triumphed creating a powerful greenbelt movement in Kenya, credited with planting millions of trees to reverse the pattern of deforestation, and restoring natural systems on which Kenyan women in particular remain the stewards and beneficiaries. In November 2006, she spearheaded the [United Nations Billion Tree Campaign](#), taking her program for reforestation around the world.

### Conclusion

How did we get here? I started talking about lanyards, and breakfast at the family camp on Tunk Lake and somehow we're in Kenya planting forests. I imagine some of you have been on a different journey this morning. Lectures aren't always the best way to keep our hearts and minds on the same subject.

If I leave you with one thought this morning, it is that collectively we must all be POETS. As one system feeds on another, our population, organization, environment and technology can sustain us or may break-down. It is up to us to navigate our Blue Boat Home.

\* HYMN No. 131, *Love Will Guide Us*

\* CLOSING WORDS

### "BLUE BOAT HOME"

Words by singer/songwriter Peter Mayer

Melody by Prichard, Hymn #207 in UU hymnal

"Blue Boat Home" is now a new hymn found in the UU hymnal supplement

(Third Verse)

I give thanks to the waves upholding me  
Hail the great winds urging me on  
Greet the infinite sea before me  
Sing the sky my sailor's song  
I was born upon the fathoms  
Never harbor or port have I known  
The wide universe is the ocean I travel  
And the earth is my blue boat home