

When I first came to UUCSC, one of the things I really appreciated was the monthly newsletter column *Getting Acquainted with Each Other* written by Helene Gersuny. Helene's warm and witty writing inspired me to write this new column, *Our Stories*, sixteen years later. Helene was reluctant to be interviewed at first saying she was a shrinking violet. As any of you who know Helene will likely agree, she is far from being a shrinking violet!

Our Stories—Helene Gersuny

As a youngster, Helene was steeped in the Catholic traditions. Yet she fell in love with a man who was a Jew and avowed atheist. Early in their relationship when they were both still in college she was so worried about his immortal soul that she baptized him in a hotel pool while on a date. She and Carl married but they remained unchurched for many years. When Helene felt they had to find a new denomination that would welcome them both, Carl chose the Unitarian Church and they were hooked at the first service. Helene remained a lifelong Unitarian Universalist; Carl lasted only until the year after he taught sixth grade Sunday school.

Helene and Carl came to Rhode Island when he accepted a position as a sociology professor at URI. She attended church at Westminster Unitarian in East Greenwich. Helene's passion for music led her to become even more involved in the UU church as she took the job of Music Director at Westminster, a position she held for 24 years.

Helene was a charter member of the UU Musician's Network which is comprised of musicians from all over the United States and Canada and she was the liaison between the network and the Ballou-Channing District (a regional district, now part of the New England Region). In 1998 when the UUMN met in Providence she coordinated the usual five days of spiritually and musically uplifting choral singing followed by an excursion to Newport—tours of several mansions, a pipe organ concert at Ocher Court, a clambake in Jamestown—AND a full moon. Way to go Helene!

William Zelazny, District Executive of the BCD, asked Helene to coordinate an annual conference to be sponsored by BCD for UU musicians throughout New England which she ended up running for seven years. She won an award from the BCD for her many years of enthusiastic volunteer work.

Helene began attending UUCSC when the congregation started meeting at the American Legion Hall in 1999. She has volunteered with the Caring Connection, the Worship Committee and she ran the Annual Plant Sale. She has continued to share her musical talents. In earlier years she had a regular gig filling in for the part-time Music Director. She was responsible for planning and executing numerous summer services. She was on the Search Committee that hired Michael Galib as our Music Director and she says she couldn't believe UUCSC's good fortune; he is a gem!

Other interesting things to know about Helene:

- Helene is a proponent of the Funeral Consumer's Alliance of RI, dedicated to meaningful end-of-life options.
- She and Carl (d. 2013) have two children and three grandchildren. A great granddaughter was born in Florida in April.
- Helene was enthusiastically involved in programs at the SK Senior Center until their Covid closure.
- She taught private piano lessons, sang tenor in the URI Chorus under George Kent and played tympani with the Wakefield Band for many years.
- She is an enthusiastic amateur birder. She and Carl loved to hike. Helene regrets that she never scaled Jerimoth Hill, RI's tallest peak at 812 feet—especially now that it is not guarded by the shotgun wielding former owner.
- In support of Black Lives Matter, Helene attended a recent rally in Narragansett, driving around with a friend at the wheel honking as they yelled and chanted. Helene is not a shrinking violet!

Elizabeth Donovan, June 2020