

Etta Zasloff Story

I was the first born of four girls, arriving on Thanksgiving Day in 1947 into the leading wave of baby boomers, following the end of WW II. Howard Orr had noticed my mother directing the children's choir at the Simpson Creek Baptist Church on his first Sunday back, and leaned over to his mother and said, "I think I'll marry that girl." And he did, but it took a while to convince country girl and secretarial school graduate, Mary Rogers, to accept the proposal from such a city slicker - the name that my mother's farmer brothers tagged him with immediately and forever. At the time he was making a living as a house painter, but later really lived up to the name, becoming a realtor, life insurance salesman and eventually a certified financial advisor.

I was born within a year of the wedding, and by my first birthday, my father, with the help of neighbors in the community, had built us a two bedroom house (later expanded, but always only one bath) on a one acre size lot, located in one corner of my mother's family farm, which had been settled as a land grant by my maternal great grandfather. I'm learning now what a privilege that was to grow up there in that particular spot, even though it was a struggle. I appreciate my hard working parents every day, who certainly passed on that work ethic to me and my sisters. I was the first person ever in my family to attend college, undoubtedly the hardest path I ever forged. But, I graduated WVU and all three of my sisters followed, giving my parents the proudest moments of their lives.

I never experienced a moment of boredom, a moment of abuse or neglect, or any unusual tragic loss. My mother was a Pollyanna, who could always see the silver lining in everything and instilled her positive approach to life in all of us and encouraged curiosity. We were religious. Besides large and frequent family affairs, Simpson Creek Baptist Church was the center of our social life. We always attended church on Sunday, Bible School, and sometimes Wednesday night services. We belonged to the children's choir and youth group. I was totally indoctrinated until I wasn't.

In 1968 I married my high school sweetheart, Frank Zasloff, who happened to be the only Jewish boy in town. I believe that he saw me as an outlier, before I realized it in myself. We explored each other's religions, but changing didn't work for either of us. To the surprise of both of our families, for the 42 years of our marriage, we each remained non-attending Christian and Jew, but celebrated every major holiday of both faiths for our two children, who were accepted and welcomed by both faith communities. We just tried to live up to the best tenets of our childhood teachings, not judging right or wrong, believing in love as the strongest binding thread. He would have been a great UU, had he survived Leukemia, which struck him down in 2010.

I retired after 44 years as a public school educator in 2014. I taught kindergarten, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades and was an elementary and middle school counselor for 18 of the 34 years total in Fairmont, WV. We moved to Hope Valley, RI, in 2003, to be closer to our children Julie and Zac who both settled in Boston, and I taught at Chariho Middle School for 10 more years. Although they were stressful, I usually welcomed and often sought placement changes, because it opened doors for learning new things. My final assignment as 6th grade Social Studies teacher of world history inspired me to explore different cultures, including in person travel, to Morocco and Guatemala.

I loved everything about teaching - the students, the school calendar, my classroom, the books, a red pen, my fellow colleagues, and even the sometimes contentious administrators I encountered. I delight in seeing or hearing from former students, who often share a vivid memory of our time together, as well as updating me on their life's progress. Teaching was and is cleverly disguised as learning, which fed that curiosity seed that my mother planted in me. Publishing a children's book, [Beginning With Xs and Os: The Evolution of the Alphabet](#),

early in my retirement brought me full circle, as I finally got the story that had been born on the floor of my kindergarten classroom out of my head.

Once a teacher, always a teacher, and I'm still known to give advice, whether or not you ask, but at this point in my life, my focus is more on emotional than academic growth. I am happy to be engaging in a small group and a racial justice group within this congregation, and they are both topping any other previous life experience I have had for emotional growth. This is truly a beloved community and one of the things that I am most grateful for in my life. I believe it was serendipity that brought me here. I came to a Music at Lily Pads performance, picked up a brochure, which listed and described the 7 principles of UU. All 7 resonated with me immediately, so I attended the service the next morning, and almost every Sunday since, officially joining about a year later in 2017. I had no prior knowledge of Unitarian Universalism, or I'm sure I would have at least explored it, but, perhaps the timing was just right. The student was ready, and a teacher appeared.

I am also grateful for my precious grandchildren, Evan (18) and Emily (15) Lindstrom and Abigail (9) and Max (7) Zasloff, who have my rapt attention, whenever they want it. I am grateful for my good health and my ability to serve as a volunteer for this congregation, OLLI at URI, HopArts Studio Trail, and the Education Exchange. In this work, I am grateful for the opportunities to serve and to learn something new every day. It feeds my soul.

Etta Zasloff
July 2020