

Our Stories—Wendy Kahn

Wendy Kahn is a new member...almost. The new member service in March at which she would have become “official” was postponed due to the Covid-19 shutdown. She was first introduced to UUCSC at the Annual Holiday Fair in 2018. She was so impressed that real plates and cups were being used instead of styrofoam that she knew she had found her RI church. Wendy considers herself a third generation UU even though she attended Sunday school at a synagogue until she was sixteen. Her aunt and uncle and grandparents were members of UU congregations so she was exposed to UU churches as a child and sought them out as an adult. The religion that she is spiritually most aligned with is that of the Tewa First Nation, to which she was introduced during two summer service projects in high school. First Nation cultures have been an interest since then.

Wendy was born and raised in New York. From the time she was eight years old, she wanted to be a doctor but was told by the society around her that she couldn't because she was female. She majored in linguistics and psychology at the University at Rochester. She entered a speech pathology program at the University of Wisconsin but through these courses realized that she could pursue medical school. During med school rotations she knew right away that pediatrics was her calling. For twenty years she practiced as a pediatrician in New York until her career was cut short when she developed Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (also known as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome), a painful and debilitating neuro-inflammatory condition, after a mishap on rollerblades.

Unfortunately, the next fourteen years were spent in constant pain and Wendy made the rounds of over 100 doctors trying to find something that would treat her condition. She had vacationed in RI for 40 years and she had always loved it here. Now she found that RI also offered some alternative care that she couldn't find elsewhere. She and her husband began traveling to RI every other week for that treatment. Six years ago they decided to rent a house in Wakefield, start the process of downsizing and move to RI permanently. They have since bought the house.

Happily, just over a year ago, thanks to the treatments she is receiving, the trapped nerve has been released and a new chapter has started in Wendy's life. Life again has possibilities. She loves to do crafts and has taken several classes at the Neighborhood Guild. She is currently taking one on repairing and refinishing furniture. She had managed to continue gardening even in ill health, finding that working on her hands and knees allowed her to keep her leg at an angle that allowed limited time in the garden. This year she was thrilled to be able to stay out in the garden for long stretches of time soaking up the sun and enjoying the sights and smells of the natural world. Every day is a blessing; everything that she can do is a joy. Soon she hopes to return to dance, rollerblading and working out.

Wendy's husband, Dennis Powell, telecommutes doing data mining for pharmaceutical companies. He doesn't attend church but was persuaded by Ed Burrell to try out the Men's Breakfast, but that too has been sidelined. No doubt Ed will find a way to lure him back.

Wendy does dearly miss the children that she used to treat as a pediatrician. Her two children, Benjamin and Jennifer, are grown but Wendy does have two adopted grandchildren. Four years ago while at Clark Farms Nursery in Wakefield she spotted a young girl meticulously pulling up weeds—roots and all. She struck up a conversation with the girl whose mother was close by. They became close friends and Wendy has visited with the the girl, now ten years old, and her seven year old sister every other week since—a relationship that is close to Wendy’s heart.

Those who say it cannot be done should stay out of the way of those who are doing it.

Ancient Chinese Proverb

Elizabeth Donovan, October 2020

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