

Our Stories—Louise McLeod—A Spiritual Journey and Brief Biography

According to my parents, the day of my birth, Easter Sunday in 1939, was bright, warm and breezy. My dad, a residential real estate salesman, was “sitting on a house,” while Mom was in labor at Rainbow Babies and Children’s Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio. When a nurse called Dad to tell him that my arrival was imminent, he closed up the open house, bolted to the neighborhood drugstore and bought a copious amount of cigars, which he joyfully handed out to almost everyone he encountered on the maternity ward. As long as my parents were alive, this story was lovingly repeated to me on my birthday each year, and I was always referred to as their “Easter Bunny.”

My brother John was born in 1940, and my sister Joan in 1943. Dad conducted much of his real estate business from the master bedroom of the fairly small house where the five of us lived for almost fifteen years. Because dad needed quiet, my siblings and I found ways to entertain ourselves outside.

One of our favorite things to do was to visit my paternal grandmother and grandfather at their home just a few blocks away. They loved us, and we adored them. They are the source of many of my happiest childhood memories, and one of my favorites is my grandmother’s playing of a lovely phonograph record of hymns, produced by the General Electric Chorus. I recall feeling a very special sense of peace and calm whenever Grandma and I sang together, along with the choir. My favorite songs were “Abide with Me” and “I Come to the Garden Alone.” The latter was a hymn I sang to myself under the towering weeping willow tree in a neighbor’s backyard, in what was perhaps my first spiritual experience...that little sanctuary was so comforting whenever home life became stressful!

When I was about twelve, I decided to attend an evangelical church about a half a block from our house. My association with that church has influenced my life to this day. The minister and his wife took me under their wings, I enrolled in the Sunday School, was “saved” every Wednesday night (a pleasant and rejuvenating experience for me), and learned most of the great traditional hymns. This newly-found church life was wonderful, but something happened around that time that was a huge challenge for my entire family and changed my spiritual path immeasurably.

My sister Joan became anorexic, and she was fed via feeding tube for nearly two years. Needless to say, all of us were devastated. When medical treatment didn’t seem to be working, Mom and Dad turned to Mom’s childhood religion of Christian Science and pursued a healing with a Christian Science practitioner. They requested that I leave my church and attend theirs, which I did very reluctantly for a couple of years. Thankfully, Joan fully recovered and lived until she was fifty-six, when she was stricken with Glioblastoma Stage 4, the same disease that killed Joe Biden’s son, Beau.

My spiritual life from that time forward included membership in a Baptist church (had a crush on the minister!), attending a United Methodist Church (loved their Friday night canteens), visiting an Orthodox Jewish Synagogue fairly regularly, and finally, joining the Quaker Church in New Jersey for a couple of years. Each of these experiences was interesting and worthwhile, but the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County has surpassed all of them in many marvelous ways. I am deeply grateful for the support I’ve received from our congregation, and I feel that I’ve found my church home at last!

A brief summary of the rest of my life, up until now:

I married my high school sweetheart in 1962. We ended up parting amicably after twenty-one years of marriage, but we’ve remained friends for sixty-five+ years. He and his SO live in Cleveland. They’re both salt-of-the-earth people, and it’s been one of the greatest gifts of my life to remain in touch with them.

My second husband, Bud, and I were happily married for nearly thirty-four years. He was immensely fun and dynamic, and I've felt a very large void in my life since he died in 2018.

Bud had five grown children when I married him and I never had children. Perhaps because I didn't have a family to raise, I was employed fairly consistently until I retired in 2002. It is then that we moved to Wakefield, following my dear friend Judi Marcy and her family from Morristown, NJ.

I got my first job when I was fourteen, working at the old F. W. Woolworth Co. as an after-school counter clerk. My pay was seventy-five cents an hour. Unfortunately, I was fired from this illustrious position. One of my assignments was to clean the parakeet cages. Not realizing that there were two floors in each cage – one to remove and clean, and another to leave in place to contain the birds – I naively slid both floors out at the same time, and a flock of birds began flying around the store, several escaping onto the street. It still breaks my heart to think about the birds that got away.

At one time, I tried to count all of the jobs I held over the years, and I came up with a grand total of fifty-seven. This includes jobs like babysitting, a number of long-term temporary jobs, and permanent employment situations in Ohio and New Jersey. My favorites were working on the copy desk at the Cleveland bureau of The Wall Street Journal, serving as an Allocations Associate at the United Way of Morris County, NJ, and doing a four-year stint as a geriatric care manager, also in NJ. My "specialties" were typing at the speed of lightning, which came in handy when working in the corporate world, writing and editing newsletters for various non-profits, and recruiting, orienting, and training volunteers.

Retirement has been terrific. I'm truly looking forward to the end of the upcoming election, and I very much hope that everyone at UUCSC will stay well throughout the pandemic and beyond. Thank you, UUCSC, for the magnificent encouragement and support you provide to all of us!

Louise McLeod, November 2020