

Our Stories— Susan Pavlow and Nick Smith

Everyone at UUCSC knows that Nick Smith is a musician—he has performed countless times at concerts and events put on by the congregation. He and his wife Susan Pavlow sing in the choir every Sunday; he has regaled us with his renditions of Beatles tunes, notably *Imagine* by John Lennon; he and Susan along with the Music Committee put on the annual music service every May; we have even heard his original music. Susan and Nick have always had a strong interest in music, and music, not surprisingly, is how they became acquainted. Susan grew up in a family that placed a high value on creativity of all kinds; she drew, she embroidered, she wrote poems and she played violin. As an adult she no longer studied violin, but she listened to music constantly, had many friends who were musicians and she frequently attended concerts and musical performances. So when her younger brother decided he wanted a band at his wedding he knew Susan could find him one. The threesome that ended up playing at that wedding in 1980 (held at the Westminster Unitarian Church) evolved into the current Patterson Smith Trio. Susan and Nick got married in 1982.

The second oldest of five children, Nick grew up in San Diego, moving to Newport in 1968 for his high school years when his father, a career navy pilot, was transferred there. Nick played in bands throughout high school, took four gap years before college to play full time and after graduating from URI with a degree in Natural Resources/Botany he made a living with his music, sometimes playing full time, sometimes having to resort to odd jobs to pay the bills.

Susan was born in RI, growing up with two brothers and a sister in Warwick. Her parents were very liberal and free thinking and she had an upbringing filled with boisterous conversation and encouragement to think for herself. Unable to find a teaching job after graduating from RIC she served as a VISTA volunteer in Oklahoma from 1974-5. Working with the Kiowa Indian Services in conjunction with the local Community Action Program, she was responsible for writing a grant for a youth shelter to house teens in need of emergency housing. She became friends with indigenous people from many different tribes. Her time there was eye opening. Upon her return and still unable to get a teaching job in RI, she accepted a one-year position at the Dever State School in Taunton, MA working with profoundly disabled adolescent boys. She felt like she had found her calling and she returned to RIC to get her Master's Degree in Special Education—with a full scholarship!

After marrying, Susan and Nick lived in the Providence metropolitan area so Nick could remain in proximity to his young son Kyle born in 1976 during a previous marriage. In the mid 1980's, Nick began to consider other career paths. Realizing that he came from a long line of educators on his mother's side of the family and with encouragement from his mother-in-law Rose Pavlow, he returned to school, graduating from RIC with a Master's Degree in Elementary Education. Nick and Susan's daughter Ligia was born in 1987 while Nick was enrolled in grad school.

In 1994 Nick was working as an ESL teacher in Warwick, a full-time job he had luckily been qualified for because of several classes he had taken when working as a substitute teacher following graduation. They decided to move south, buying a little ranch house in Green Hill that they fell in love with and where they still live today. Right about that same time Susan got a position as a Special Ed resource teacher in Central Falls—a rather long but worthwhile commute as she found she loved the job.

Susan had been a member of Westminster Unitarian Church in East Greenwich as a young adult but as a married couple she and Nick did not attend any church until they decided that Ligia should have some sort of spiritual upbringing. Nick had been raised in a Fundamentalist Protestant sect and had rejected Christianity and the dogma associated with it. He was

comfortable with the UU faith, having been introduced to it by Susan and her mother Rose and having performed at the Westminster Church, sometimes working with Helene Gersuny who was the Music Director there at the time. They started attending UUCSC when the congregation was meeting at St. Augustine's Church in Kingston. They have been very active in the Music Committee and the Personnel Committee. Nick considers the choir his spiritual Small Group and his strongest connection to the congregation. Susan and Nick were on the search committee that hired Mike Galib as our Music Director and they both think he is absolutely amazing.

Ligia started Suzuki guitar lessons when she was seven years old. She often performed with Nick and she still plays today, singing and playing guitar and banjo in a mashup of traditional Bluegrass with modern compositions known as Newgrass. She graduated from URI summa cum laude and with a Presidential Award earning a degree in Political Science. After a year in Korea teaching English and several jobs she returned to school to get a JD degree in environmental law from the Vermont Law School. She works for the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) in Colorado and recently completed a project on recycling solar panels and car batteries. Nick and Susan were thrilled to see her for the first time in over a year when she returned home for an extended Christmas visit this year (complete with Covid precautions).

Nick and Susan both truly enjoyed their teaching careers and they will enthusiastically tell you stories of the students and work they loved; Susan retired in 2013, Nick in 2015. Nick continues to play in several bands and they enjoy traveling during the winter months—though the pandemic has put a monkey wrench in those activities. Now they are focusing on projects around the house and being committed to their physical health and well-being. They walk nearly every day. Nick works on recording original music compositions, surfs year-round whenever he can and hikes frequently with his Covid pod buddy Russell. Despite the fact that Susan and Nick miss the live rehearsals they are really pleased to be able to continue singing with the choir during the pandemic...although recording for Zoom choir is challenging even for a seasoned musician like Nick.

Elizabeth Donovan, February 2021