

## Our Stories—Will and Elise Bender

Those of you who know Elise Bender may be surprised to hear that she majored in criminal justice at Northeastern University. You won't be surprised to hear that after six months behind a desk at a law firm she knew that this was not the work she was meant to do. Fortunately, she had also minored in sociology so she set about the task of trying to figure out how to use her education in work that was more meaningful to her.

Elise was raised in Dorchester, MA by parents who identified culturally and religiously as Jewish. Elise tried but never felt the same connection to the faith as they did. Will grew up in Sudbury, MA and at the age of 13 starting attending the UU Area Church at First Parish in Sherborn with his mother who had joined three years earlier. Will was drawn to the church primarily by the glorious smell of fresh coffee that wafted up into the sanctuary during services—coffee that he was allowed to drink during the subsequent social hour.

It was at Northeastern that Elise and Will met in 1979. He got his degree in business and marketing. They fell in love and married. Elise was unfamiliar with UUism prior to Will's introducing her to it and she found that it more closely fit with and met with her values and beliefs. They settled into married life.

As a child, Will had often traveled to RI to visit his grandparents; his parents later retired to Snug Harbor. In 1985 when Will's father passed away, he and Elise and their young children moved to RI the following year to be closer to his mom. Will decided to return to school for his Master's Degree. By the time he completed his degree they found they quite liked living in South County and here they have stayed.

Elise worked a series of retail management jobs and she and Will had three children before she realized that children were her calling and she opened her own child care business in 1992. She soon discovered that she cared for the families as much as the children and had at last found a way to integrate her education and training. So began a 25 year career during which much love was bestowed on the many children that passed through her door and she in turn received much love back. She had paid assistants but the business was also a family affair; each of Elise and Will's three children were required to help out as teenagers. Will also participated whenever he could. In later years when working from home, he would come down during lunch breaks to entertain and teach babies how to raise their chubby little arms in the air at his command of "touchdown."

The three Bender children, Daryl-now 40 years old, Charlotte Marie-35 years old and Adrienne-28 years old always said that working in the day care was the best form of birth control their parents could have found. That has remained true as there are no grandchildren...yet, though Elise and Will have two grand-doggies that they absolutely dote on. Daryl still lives close by, Charlotte and her husband live in Boulder, CO where Will and Elise love to visit when we are not in the midst of a pandemic, and Adrienne lives in North Attleboro.

Will and Elise started attending UUCSC with his mother when the congregation was meeting on the third floor of the Kingston Library. With young children their attendance was sporadic and it wasn't until 1999 when Elise's brother passed away that she felt a real need for spiritual connection. The congregation was meeting at the Legion Hall by that time and the two girls began attending RE. Today the children don't attend church but Charlotte says that if she ever were to go to church it would be a UU church.

Because of their busy work and family lives Will and Elise's volunteer work at UUCSC built up slowly, growing when the church moved to its new location at Lily Pads. Will served multiple terms on the Finance Committee as Treasurer of UUCSC and has been our webmaster for the last several years—jobs that aligned with his work skills. Will is a project leader at ON Semiconductor and for the last 6 years of his 20 year career with the company he has worked both at the office and now from home (due to Covid-19) connecting with people all over the world. When Rev. Knost was the interim minister at UUCSC he asked Elise to head up The Core of Ushers and a few years later Rev. DL asked her to expand on that and be the chair of the Membership Committee, a role she now shares with Betty Bogutt.

After deciding to close her daycare business, Elise wanted to do something that allowed her more flexible hours. She chose to work part-time assisting older folks to be able to remain living in their homes. That has led to her now having three clients that she meets with weekly to do household chores, cook a meal, help with paperwork or to take them to doctor's appointments or shopping. The work requires the same kind of care and compassion that had proven to be Elise's gift when she worked with children.

Will and Elise both really miss Sunday services and coffee hours— the individual people of the congregation, the many friends and acquaintances. Will wanted to give a shoutout to his birthday twin, Ed Burrell. He notes that when they dress alike on their special day you can barely tell them apart. Tom Patterson is a special friend and is part of the Bender's pandemic pod. It is another relationship in which they receive as much as they give. The relationship spans three generations as the Bender children also really enjoy his company. During the pandemic Elise has found time to write letters to people she hasn't connected with in some time. She ends each letter with the following valediction, and would like to share it with everyone at UUCSC:

Take Care! Be Well! Stay Safe!

*Elizabeth Donovan, February 2021*