

Our Stories--Tom and Dorie Lawson

Tom and Dorie Lawson found their way to our congregation via the social justice group. Disheartened and upset following the 2016 election, they had thrown themselves into volunteering with Resist Hate RI to combat the increasing social injustices they saw around them. Letter writing, canvassing, phone work—they did whatever they could to try to make a difference. But it still left them feeling too much turmoil. At the advice of good friend Ali Buffum, they started attending the Social Justice Group here at UUCSC. They liked working with a local group and appreciated the calm, positive actions that were recommended and the chance to share the frustrations of a changing political climate.

Soon they started attending Sunday services and quickly began to feel that UUCSC is their spiritual home. Lifetime practicing Catholics who had in recent years stopped attending services they were pleased to be in a church where they could agree with the values and with the messages. And they already knew many UUCSC members through social events held at the home of Dorie's sister Marcia Boyd, a long time UUCSC member now living in North Carolina. They became members in 2017.

As they were getting more involved with social justice and with UUCSC, Covid changed everything. Like so many of us they were deeply affected by the disconnect and isolation. Dorie became quite adept at using Zoom and maintained connections with friends and family. Tom continued to work but was starting to think about future retirement (though he admits with a smile that he never really planned to retire fully). He decided to get his necessary hip replacement and hernia surgery taken care of before retirement.

Shortly after those successful surgeries he began experiencing cognitive problems and personality changes. These changes were eventually diagnosed as Lewy Body Dementia which had likely been triggered early by the anesthesia during the surgeries. Lewy Body Dementia (LBD) is the second most common form of dementia, following Alzheimer's Disease and is a difficult diagnosis to hear.

Four years from the onset of symptoms Tom is doing quite well, the result of excellent medical care, many life adjustments, the care and advocacy of Dorie, the support of many in the LBD community and positivity—a practice of gratitude that they have cultivated over their forty-year marriage. Tom has learned that you can live well with this disease... but differently. Hope is necessary and Dorie and Tom are helped in this regard by the active LBD support community that they participate in including four online support meetings. They have connected with people around the country who have the disease or who are caregivers, and they consider many of them close friends. Dorie has become the leader of the organization's caregiver support group.

In September daughter Lauren, her husband Ben and granddaughter Theo moved in with Dorie and Tom. Multigenerational living really suits them. Dorie's father had lived with them when Lauren was a child, so the experience wasn't new to them, and they find that it brings many rewards. They like being available for last minute babysitting and Theo has a devoted Gra and Mimi to dote on her.

When Tom was diagnosed one of the first things they did was create a bucket list. One notable item that they have checked off was renewing their vows which they did at Narragansett Beach with Rev. Betty Kornitzer officiating. Their faces light up when they talk about how much fun the day was and all the people that shared in the celebration with them.

The support from the LBD group has been immense but they realized that it is different than the support they can get at UUCSC. The LBD support group by design doesn't include religion or politics, two topics of interest to Dorie and Tom. They felt they needed to get back to in-person services and did so at the beginning of this year. Dorie says it is a tremendous relief to be at church with like-minded people. And they were just thrilled when Lauren recently became a member also. And Tom gets a chance to follow Theo around after service—she does like to roam.

They continue to find ways to live well. They like to travel and having realized that it is helpful for Tom to have familiarity with his surroundings they have purchased a camper to travel to visit some of the people they have met through the LBD support groups and to explore the United States and the Canadian Maritimes.

They remember every day to be grateful for what they have and what they can do.

Elizabeth Donovan May/2025