



Ploughshare

Peace in Our Bones

by Cindy Pincus, Consulting Minister

Bones. A collection of mineral salts, calcium phosphates, collagen fibers. These chemicals are woven together to create the scaffolding of our bodies. We're born with 270 soft bones that gradually form into 206 hard bones by the time we're 20 years old, though the sutures across our skulls don't fully fuse until we're 35. Bones stretch, flex, grow, and shrink over our lifetimes and bones tell the story of our living.

Forensic anthropology is the study of human remains to learn something about the life and death of whoever left those remains behind. Usually all that's left is the bones, since bones decompose much more slowly than flesh. Some of the things that a forensic anthropologist might look for when examining a skeleton are bone ridges along the major muscular bones like arms, biceps, thighs, quads, knees, hips. When these long muscles are used over a lifetime - for example, lifting coal in a mine, lifting bundles of grain for the market, lifting library books in an academic program - then parts of our flesh actually become bone. The tendons and ligaments and sinews that attach our

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The World We Envision

by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

First Unitarian Society of Denver has a long history connection with social justice organizations in our community. Our building has hosted meetings and organizers for civil rights, women's rights, racial equality, animal rights, environmental wellness, mental health initiatives, LGBTQ rights, immigration rights, economic justice, water rights, union and labor rights, and child safety. To be fair, I may have missed something in my list. We've been busy! Our call to seek justice in our world is a part of our identity. Justice work requires many hands, many voices, and at times, many generations to realize the world that we envision.

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muscle to our bone become ossified, hard as bone, and when we die, small bone ridges are left all over our body. What we do in the flesh, forms in the bone.

Another thing forensic anthropologists might look to for clues about our life are the shape of our teeth. The color of our teeth, the length, the presence of wisdom teeth or baby teeth, implants and fillings, and the wear and tear on teeth can all say something about how a person lived. If we know something about the society that person lived in, we might be able to look at their teeth and say, this was someone from a lower class who wore down their teeth eating hard grains. Or we could look and say this was someone who could afford fillings and dental care so they probably had enough money to eat softer foods too. Combine that information with those same bone ridges and the picture starts to fill out. What we do in the flesh, forms in the bone.

Forensic anthropologists might also look for the way bones have changed shape over the course of a person's life. Societies in Asia where people tend to squat frequently means that their kneecaps and the ends of their tibia, fibula – the lower leg bones – and their femurs – the thigh bones change shape to accommodate that squatting position. The vertebrae in our backbones also change over time. If you can imagine a disk shape, that's one vertebrae and your backbone consists of 33 disks stacked on top of each other. Now of course, they aren't stacked perfectly straight or we'd all be pretty uncomfortable, but instead there is a natural curve to the spine. Over time, this curve wears on the edges of each disk and the curve becomes more exaggerated as the muscles deteriorate in old age and disks lose their shape. A forensic anthropologist could look at a knee bone or a vertebrae and make an estimate as to just how old that person is and what kind of work they did during their life. Did they have time to rest, squat, smoke a cigarette with friends? Did they carry heavy loads that bent their back and shaped their disks in one way or another?

Truly, bones tell a story and what we do in the flesh, forms in the bone. Sometimes the stories told are simple ones, like what was mentioned above; what kind of work a person did in their life, what they ate, how they rested.

Bones can tell us beautiful stories about the lives we live. What bone ridge is formed in our arms when we hold a child or a grandchild? How does that ridge grow longer, more bony as that child grows and we continue to pick her up, hold her close, even when we like to say, "Oh you're getting way too heavy for me to do this"

What are the shape and size of your teeth when they're frequently washed with warm tea, hot coffee, and loving conversations with friends. How does your tongue push against your soft palate in your mouth and reshape your nasal cavity when you're able to eat and swallow delicious food and laugh with friends. These things, too, change the shape of your face, the tension in your jawbones, and the way your skull sits on your spine.

What do your vertebrae disks look like after a lifetime of leaning sideways against a lover on your couch as you watch a movie on Friday night? What do your ribs look like where they fuse at your sternum at your spine when you've filled your days with deep meditative breathing. How gentle and delicate are those cartilage attachments when you breath deep, open the diaphragm, breath into the back of your shoulders and chest?

What happens to your thigh bones when you spend a few weeks every year hiking through Tahoe National forest, climbing 10,000 feet to see the mid-day sun over the mountain range. How might your calf muscles change the shape of your shin bones after a decade of playing soccer?

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Our relationships within our denomination and beyond our building walls have solidified our place in the Denver community of activists. Recently, our relationships have provided us support when we offered Sanctuary to Arturo Hernandez and Jeanette Vizguerra. We've provided meeting space to racial justice organizers who seek to lift up the lived experience of persons of color and dismantle systems of white supremacy. We are renovating our physical space so that this work and that these relationships continue far into the future. The experience of being remote from our home during renovation continues to provide us with new ways to reach out into our community, and to receive grace from our neighbors.

It has been almost one year since we opened our doors to Jeanette when her stay of deportation was denied under the new policies in a new administration. I still remember the way that organizations we had partnered with in the past came to support Jeanette and our congregation on the first Sunday that Jeanette was officially in our house. Walking into our building that morning, seeing that we were surrounded by familiar faces from Black Lives Matter 5280 and SURJ Denver (Standing up for Racial Justice) as well as other local activists and leaders brought me a peace that I've rarely experienced.

Sharing our Christmas service this year with First Universalist as they celebrated their very first service in their new building after 18 months of renovation was a joyful, exhilarating occasion. From that collaboration, it is my deep hope that we continue to work in deep and meaningful ways with our local UU congregations, fellow liberal religious traditions, and community organizations as conspirators for peace and justice in our world. The work we do does not exist in a silo. It is our relationships that inspire and sustain our justice work in the Denver community. And there is so much to be done.

The UUA Standing on the Side of Love campaign will celebrate 30 Days of Love beginning on Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and ending on Valentines Day this year. This inclusive month-long social justice vigil calls us to lift up those voices, including our own, who co-conspire to improve our world. The Rev. Marisol Caballero created an all ages guide to assist our youngest and our wisest justice seekers in celebrating the love present in the work that others have done and that we still have yet to realize. From pajama parties, to discussion questions, to blogs posts and videos, this guide gives you simple ways to intentionally partner with your family and community to flex your own justice knowledge and even find moments of peace to sustain the work that we do together.

In a move toward inclusion for all, the UUA Standing on the Side of Love campaign has recently changed their name to Side with Love. Find out more about the name change along with the guide for 2018's 30 Days of Love celebration at sidewithlove.org.

May 2018 bring you peace, connection, and justice!

President's Corner by *Stu Ferguson, President, Board of Trustees*

Happy New Year! I had several interesting conversations with some computer experts this holiday season, my son, his friend, and my brother-in-law. They all were working on artificial intelligence to help with astronomy analysis, building robots that interact with humans, and programming 30 mph warehouse robots for Walmart. It's clear that interactive computers are here to stay. In one of the more interesting conversations we discussed the personality they were building into robots and how young kids treated them as if they were alive. Because of that, it was important that the robots carefully interact with the kids and not be sarcastic or punitive. It wouldn't occur to me to pay attention to the robot's personality, but I can now see that it can be important.

The pros and cons were weighed in a recent news story. Certainly, many jobs including warehouse workers and commercial drivers will be eliminated. But there may be many positive effects on our lives for example in education. A smart computer would be able to assess how well a student understood a topic and tailor an educational plan for that student's learning style. In this way workers might be retrained for work that is appropriate to their skill level and in an area needing skilled workers.

It was reassuring to me that at least some people I know are struggling with what the future will look like and trying to build some compassion into their artificial intelligence projects. Our church community will need to prepare for the dramatic societal changes coming as smarter machines take over many functions currently performed by our work force.

Opportunities to Make a Difference by *Roz Heise*

When First Unitarian made the decision to hold our Sunday services at Manual High School, we learned of an opportunity to be of service to some of its students. Stu Ferguson has shared a list of many different possibilities at Manual and it is my hope that many of us will find a way, as individuals, to become a part of this remarkable high school family.

I have chosen to work with Julie Malek, the librarian, in the "Reading Partners" program. I have two delightful students, one a junior and one a sophomore. Both are extremely motivated and working very hard to improve their reading skills. They are also establishing a healthy relationship with a committed adult who cares about their future.

I see this as a significant "win-win", with all three of us coming away with a positive experience.

Some you you are familiar with the "Starfish Story". For me, that message is the most potentially successful path to changing our world....one starfish and one student at a time. We are all exposed to a daily barrage of important social needs and, for me, it is overwhelming. The "Reading Partners" program is one of the ways I can contribute and, hopefully, make a difference.

If you have any questions, please be in touch...or contact Julie Malek directly at julie_malek@dpsk12.org. For today...the new year is a great time to fill our lives with meaningful and joyful service.

Faith in Action Council Calls for Congregational Projects by Stephanie Walton, Faith-In-Action chair

The Faith-In-Action Council is currently accepting applications for congregational projects addressing social justice issues. Faith-In-Action oversees and supports FUSD's social justice initiatives. As part of that process, the Council reviews applications each year and makes recommendations at the annual congregational meeting each spring regarding which projects should be approved. We recommend that anyone who is interested in applying for a congregational project contact the Faith-in-Action Council and let us know! The process of filling out this application will help everyone involved—project members, FUSD staff, and the congregation at large—transform our Unitarian Universalist values into committed actions to make a positive impact in our community on our chosen justice issues.

Projects that receive congregational approval also get their own budget (proposed in their application). In addition, Faith-In-Action supports social justice circles. These are typically smaller, more informal initiatives. Any member or group of members can start a social justice circle simply by letting the Faith-In-Action Council know. Most projects start as circles and apply for project status after one or two years as a circle.

The Council provides liaisons to every project and circle. Currently, FUSD supports three congregational projects: the Homelessness and Hunger initiative comprised of our Family Promise work, Women's Homelessness Initiative, and MetroCaring support; Immigration Justice, and Racial Justice. In addition, we have social justice circles focused on mental health and wellbeing, Whole Souul Economy, and gun violence.

APPLICATIONS ARE DUE TO FAITH-IN-ACTION ON MARCH 12. If you are interested in expanding FUSD's social justice work, please contact Stephanie Walton, Faith-In-Action chair, at stephaniewalton717@gmail.com.

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What might your toe bones look like if you've spent your life dancing? How might the ball of your heel and foot gently wear smooth if you spend every Friday evening swing dancing, salsa dancing, or just plain out dancing in the Castro?

If we are made in the image of God, then bones and bodies tell us that we are also made in the movement, and change, and growth of God. Our skeletons, our bones, the core of our physical being dances, and plays, and laughs as the core of God's being dances and plays and laughs. As our skeletons absorb our stories, as we are physically transformed by our lives, so is The Spirit of Life transformed. As The Holy Giver brings us children to hold, burdens to lift for each other, miles and mountains to walk with friends, as God brings us the sorrow of the death of our family members, grief that bends our backs, sadness that shifts the very shape of our bones, we are transformed. These physical bodies hold our stories and eventually our stories hold us.

In the ridges, and the vertebrae, and the remnants of muscle and cartilage, we can see the promise of full life come around to speak to us again. All it takes is to run your fingers along that bony ridge, to feel the strength and smoothness of a vertebrae, or to see the delicate curve of an unbroken rib to resurrect the story of a lifetime.

My hope and blessing for you is that your bones tell the story of a rich peaceful life, that someday when all that's left of you is your bones they will say only that you were loved by this earth and loved it in return in as many ways as possible.

Whole Souul Living

Peace is the Whole Souul Living Theme for January, and it represents a profoundly challenging hope! Pacifist A. J. Muste wrote: We cannot have peace if we are only concerned with peace. War is not an accident. It is the logical outcome of a certain way of life. If we want to attack war, we have to attack that way of life. In other words, as participants in that way of life, we need to work both outwardly and inwardly.

The questions below are for personal and communal reflection this month.

- Even Muste uses the warlike word “attack” in his quote about peace! What does this say about our culture and language?
- The bible talks about, “The peace the passes understanding.” But what about the understanding that leads to peace? What is your Peace? And, what is your understanding?
- What have you learned about Peace in your lifetime? Is it teachable?
- What should (your) church be teaching children about Peace?



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