

**9/25/2011**

"The Buck Stops Here"  
Chuck Jones, Speaker

**Call to Worship**

Three years ago, I was working in Corporate Communications at a large data technology company here in Alpharetta. I was making a very good salary as I worked every day to protect and enhance the image of my employer. This company was bought out by a much larger company and my job was one of hundreds that were eliminated. Despite my best efforts, I haven't been able to find a fulltime job. While I have worked sporadically as a communications consultant, I currently have two part-time jobs and consider myself among the "under-employed."

The economy has been tough on us all. But just when I start to feel really angry and more than a little sorry for myself, along comes a situation like I experienced this past Thursday.

I was getting ready to leave my job at a bookstore to come to UUMAN for our monthly Board meeting. Charlie, my much younger manager, suddenly rushed out of the store, asking me to stay over a few minutes; he needed to run an errand.

So I stayed behind the counter, handling transactions and engaging in a conversation with Stewart, a scruffy handyman who hangs around our shopping center doing whatever odd jobs the various stores might need done to give him a little money. Frankly, Stewart had an odor to him, but he also had several nasty red lumps on his face that looked like insect bites.

While I was feeling painfully inconvenienced at not being able to leave and facing the likelihood of getting stuck in traffic and being late for the Board meeting, I was at first just half-listening to Stewart until he told me he had recently been thrown out of a motel where he had been staying because he could no longer afford the meager weekly rent. Before the motel, he said, he had been spending each night in the woods, in a tent in Alpharetta.

After getting tossed from the motel, Stewart said he went back to the woods and found his tent was gone. With no form of shelter and with no sleeping bag or bedroll, he lay down among the trees and weeds and slept in the woods. He was bitten several times by insects. As luck would have it, it rained that night.

After several minutes, Charlie, my much younger manager, came back into the bookstore. In one hand, he was carrying a tent; in the other, he was carrying a big plastic bag containing various other supplies to help make Stewart's existence just a little bit better.

Life is humbling. We should be humble. We should not dwell on what we once had. We should not be concerned with what we don't have. We should be grateful for all that we do have.

### **Meditation and Silent Reflection**

One of the things I truly enjoy about our services here at UUMAN each week is sitting where you are and gazing out the windows above and behind me, and taking in the glory of the trees, the birds, the sky that you can see beyond the glass.

Observe the intricacies of the tree limbs as they wind together and reach toward the sun. Watch the leaves as they gently flutter in the breeze or tumble toward the ground as they are starting to do now.

As that scene changes virtually each week of the year, I gain a renewed appreciation for the majesty that is nature and our world.

I offer these words from UU minister Timothy Haley ...

*Amid all the noise in our lives, we take this moment to sit in silence --  
to give thanks for another day;  
to give thanks for all those in our lives  
who have brought us warmth and love;  
to give thanks for the gift of life.*

*We know we are on our pilgrimage here but a brief moment in time.  
Let us open ourselves, here, now, to the process of becoming more whole --  
of living more fully;  
of giving and forgiving more freely;  
of understanding more completely  
the meaning of our lives here on this earth.*

A moment of silence.

## **Sermon**

Many of you are aware that my lovely wife and I are from Arkansas. She was born and reared in a wonderful small town in South Arkansas named Magnolia, located about an hour north of Shreveport, Louisiana. What you may not know is that I was born and lived the first 20 years of my life in Kansas City.

One of the most famous people who hailed from the Kansas City area was known as "The Man From Independence," a then small community situated on the eastern edge of the city.

Harry Truman, 33rd President of the United States, is widely known for the expression, "The Buck Stops Here," which famously appeared on a sign that sat on his desk in the Oval Office during his tenure as President.

While he didn't really create the expression, he is known for it, for the sentiment of accepting ultimate responsibility for events that took place on his watch.

No way am I even remotely comparing my tenure as President of the UUMAN Board of Trustees with incredible responsibilities of the position of the President of the United States.

I consider it an honor to be in a leadership position for this community. I have enjoyed it thus far – and realized as I was preparing my remarks that my tenure is already one-fourth completed – and I look forward to continuing to serve this community for the next 281 days, 13 hours and 45 minutes. Not that anyone is counting!

My wife and I joined this community in 2005. We were attracted by the liberal leanings and open minds of the members of this community. We have forged many precious friendships here ... friendships that will surely last a lifetime. We are pleased to consider you to be our friends and we hope you feel the same about us.

But it's more than friendship that keeps us coming here. Among other things, it is your genuine caring attitude about -- and commitment to act on -- many important aspects of life, particularly injustice wherever it is found ... your willingness to help those in need, witness your monthly donations to the North Fulton Community Charities food bank ... and your dedication toward zealously protecting the planet on which we all live and rely.

Two years ago, this community decided it was time to revisit our mission statement ... to refresh the verbiage to better describe who we are today and what we are all about.

Many of you will recall, but some of you may not be aware, that we held a series of meetings at which we all contributed thoughts and suggestions to develop our new mission statement.

After collecting all of your comments, a group of us were charged by the board to sit down and consider virtually each and every word and perspective you contributed. And we did.

We examined every phrase, every sentiment that you contributed to this very important process. Our intent was to develop a mission statement that not only described who we are as individuals and a community, but a statement that we could live within and aspire to every week, every day. The result is printed on your Order of Service ... where it appears each week:

*"We come together to create an environment of diversity and transformative growth and to nurture one another in an open-minded search for truth and justice within our walls and beyond."*

At a congregational meeting, the community agreed that these words do describe who we are today and capture our aspirations as individuals and as a community. We do come together to create an environment of diversity and transformative growth. We do come together to nurture one another in an open-minded search for truth and justice within our walls and beyond.

We do recognize and accept that it is our responsibility – individually and collectively – to uphold these words ... to live by them ... to do our part.

We believe this mission statement supports the Seven Principles which all Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote. You may be aware of these principles, you have heard them before, but they are worth repeating to remind us that UUMAN is part of a much larger community that affirms and promotes:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- We affirm and promote acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

- We affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- And we affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

These are important words ... words that become a noble covenant when members of communities such as ours dedicate themselves to living them. Really living them.

That's what we are doing today at UUMAN ... lighting our symbolic chalice to spark the fire of commitment to affect real change within our community and outside our walls in the larger community and indeed the world.

That's why I agreed to serve among the leadership of this community ... to hopefully engage and inspire you to join us on our journey. We have a very good group of individuals serving on your Board of Trustees and I am proud to serve this year as President of the Board. As Harry Truman said:

*"All the president is, is a glorified public relations man who spends his time flattering, kissing, and kicking people to get them to do what they are supposed to do anyway."*

That sounds about right, doesn't it?

People frequently encouraged Truman to "Give 'em hell, Harry!" But Truman was fond of responding, *"I never gave anybody hell! I just told the truth and they thought it was hell."*

Harry Truman also provides another very relative bit of insight:

*"It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit."*

So, it is in this spirit that I invite you to join us on our UUMAN journey. I encourage you to get involved ... in whatever capacity you wish to be involved here at UUMAN. There are plenty of things to do.

We face many challenges ... UUMAN seems to always be facing financial challenges ... this year is no different. We have faced down serious challenges before and I'm confident we will do so again.

We welcome your service to this community in whatever ways you wish to provide it. I speak from experience when I say that serving this community will enrich your life ... and your service will certainly enrich this community.

We look forward to standing with you as we address important issues today and tomorrow. We look forward to seeing you each week here in service and at various occasions during the year. We look forward to serving with you on committees or on the Board. (We are always looking for new leaders.)

We seek your guidance to help ensure that UUMAN remains a "shining oasis of liberalism in North Fulton," as Dan Ben-David likes to call us.

So where are you on your spiritual journey? Where do you want to go? How can we help you get there? How can you help us and our community move forward? Let's find out together.

We are so glad you are here, joining with us as we aspire to live within the words of our mission statement, and as we work diligently to keep alive our fire of commitment.

Blessed be.