



Interfaith Inspirer

An Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth News Publication



Considerations for the New Year!

- Don't die before you're dead or let fear fuel your choices.
- Cultivate friendships that lift you up.
- Every morning, give yourself a hug before your feet hit the floor.
- Tell those who share the ride with you how much you love them and appreciate them. Give them a hug as well. Do it often.
- Eat dessert first.
- The truth about life is that none of us get out of it alive.
- Enjoy the ride.

*All that I want is one who knows me
A kind hand on my face when I weep
And I'd give back these things I know are
meaningless*

*For a little fire beside me when I sleep
Emmylou Harris - "Little Fire"*

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I Am Racist

by Bethany King



I grew up in the relatively small town of Clarkston, Michigan. I believe the population was 99% white. It sure seemed that way! In school, I learned about how, a long time ago, there was slavery in the southern states. At that time, I did not grasp the atrocity of slavery or the systematic denial of basic rights that follow, but I could rest assured it was history and had been dealt with long ago. Thank goodness we "northerners" were on the RIGHT side of that!

The class discussion that inevitably followed was one of the students telling the teacher that if we had been alive during slavery, we would have been abolitionists and even if it was illegal to help the "slaves," that would not have stopped us because it was the right thing to do; we'd insist with the conviction of children who see clearly. Our teacher would then remind us that even if a "northerner" wasn't pro-slavery, that didn't mean they were anti-slavery, and most likely, we would have been "too busy" farming, mining, and going to church to get involved. Besides, the likelihood that we would have behaved any differently (i.e., better) than our neighbors, our family, or maybe even our churches was slim to none despite hindsight being so clear!

As a freshman in college, I remember the first time a black male classmate sat down at the same lunch table as me. My stomach immediately tightened and did a somersault; my eyes averted him, my pulse quickened, and I realized I was feeling fear. It wasn't persistent, but it was fear. But why?? How?? I had never even met a person of color before, so why did I feel afraid? Why did my body physically react like that?

Racist continued on p. 5



Meet...

Jennifer Grace

by Norah Reilly

Jennifer is a Michigander who was born in Livonia. When she was five, she moved to a small 14-acre farm near Howell and attended schools in the

neighboring town. Jennifer was married in 1997 and had three children aged 19–26. From 1999–2014, she was a music minister's wife in a large United Pentecostal Church (UPCI), where she was a key player in fundraising, outreach, choir, music leadership, childcare, and the Sunday school program. Jennifer has taught 12-step programs within the Livingston County jail and acted as a caregiver to all ages within the small communities she's lived across SE Michigan.

During her time with UPCI, her entire family were bishops and considered leaders within the council of the church elder group. Jennifer remained an active member until she parted ways with the organization in 2014.

In 2016, Jennifer took a tumble down eight steps onto a concrete basement floor, breaking both her pelvis and femur. This event left her bed-bound on and off for years and required three surgeries over the next few years to repair the damage and remove a section of her spine. Since she recovered from her final spinal surgery in 2021, she has been able to reclaim the years lost to immobility. She's been learning to do simple, fun things again, such as dancing with Dr. Bob, hiking with Randall and Todd, swimming, and even horseback riding!

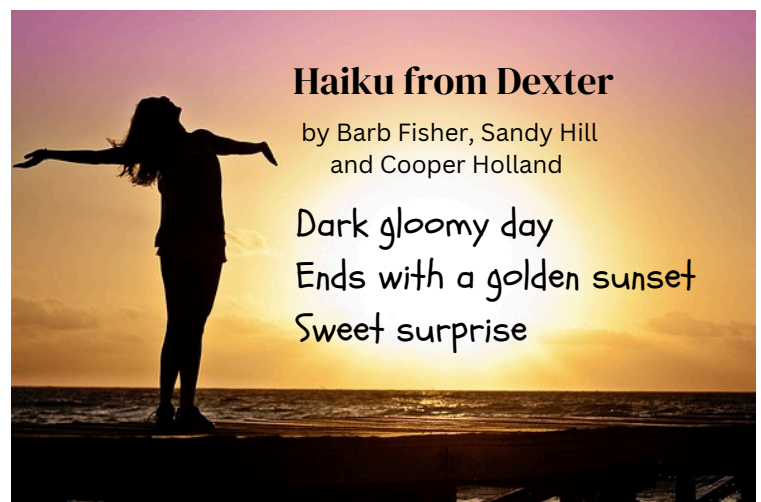
Her goal is to purchase a home locally to continue the care for herself and her family as they age. It's a project she lovingly calls "Dying with Dignity."

She has been coming to Interfaith for eight years. It has been a safe haven with strong support, where she is pursuing a life lived in an attitude of abundance with people who honor compassion and reciprocation.

Her favorite aspect of Interfaith is the deep regard for individuals' paths as an inexplicable part of each person's intrinsic agency as we emote mutual admiration in the knowledge that we are all beautifully broken creatures. She's been in several places to worship, but it's a quality expressed holistically at Interfaith, and she would never change that even if she could! Two experiences that most profoundly affected Jennifer's spiritual path, are a near-death experience at her birth and hearing one of her children's heartbeats in her womb. These events had an immediate impact on her and led her to a deep personal practice in all aspects of herself. Additionally, she has an abiding love of nature, which she finds peaceful and restorative.

She has come to believe that as growth changes us, it comes with growing pains that can hurt like 'hell.' Knowing this, she has learned to be kind to herself and to kill what she terms "the dis-ease" in any arena of life. She believes many small, loving actions add up to a deep sense of gratitude and peace over time. Her mantra is to "love the hell out of it," whatever "it" may be. Spiritual luminaries for her include Ram Dass and Kahlil Gibran. Literary heroes like Maya Angelou and Walt Whitman and entertainment legends like Viola Davis and Nina Simone have also helped shape and significantly impact her worldview and spiritual trajectory.

One fun fact you may not know about Jennifer: She has been an official storm spotter and chaser since the 90s, "chasing 'naders" (tornadoes) long before cellphone radar and maps were available!



Haiku from Dexter

by Barb Fisher, Sandy Hill
and Cooper Holland

Dark gloomy day
Ends with a golden sunset
Sweet surprise



Ministerial Miscellany-New Year Resolutions

by Rev. Annie Kopko

At this time of year, many of us like to make New Year's resolutions. Mine usually go like this: My resolution is not to make any resolutions this year (because I usually don't keep them, so what is the point). Until I found this one: "Let our New Year's resolution be this: We will be there for one another as fellow members of humanity." – Goran Persson

Most of us don't have big families these days, or if we do, they might be scattered all over the country, so we celebrate our holidays with those around us, at our work, or in our communities. For me, every Sunday feels like a great celebration when we connect at Interfaith. You are my best friends, and I hope that I am yours. You are my family, and I hope that I am yours.

Of course there is a point in making resolutions, even if we don't keep them all. We get a chance to think in terms of things we can do for ourselves to do better. This is important creative thinking. It is so much harder to move forward in our lives if we do not set out with some aspirational thinking. New Year's Resolutions are just one way to accomplish this. I really like this quotation I found in an old calendar: "Our only limit to what we can achieve lies in what we can imagine." We have to start in our own imagination. When my son Alex was a teenager, I would often say in reply to some negative or limiting remark, "You never know."

Let us continue to imagine the best for ourselves, each other, and our Interfaith spiritual community. Together we can create much more than each of us can do alone.

Blessings for this New Year to ALL of us!

Annie



January 5 Peggy Lubahn
 January 13 Sheila Orlowski
 January 14 Jeanne Adwani
 January 15 Alaura Massaro
 January 16 Vicki Davinich
 January 19 Vivian Sanders
 January 20 Lucie Nisson
 January 23 Annemarie Howse
 January 24 Janet Somalinog
 January 25 Brett Koon
 January 26 Jennifer Lenders
 January 29 Lisa Salisbury
 January 29 Marice Clark



Thoughts on AI

by Dave Snyder

Over the past two years, "AI" or "artificial intelligence" has received a lot of attention. From the beginning, I had some concerns: 1) there was a lot of disinformation related to "AI," and

2) the emphasis on AI could lead to the devaluation of human effort and abilities. Over time, I had another concern; some people seem to be afraid of AI.

The AI optimists have a viewpoint: humans are machines, and by extension, the human brain is a computer. If this is true, it should be possible to create a computer algorithm that can do everything the human brain can do.

I don't agree. AI software has managed to duplicate some human abilities, but not all of them. This situation is unlikely to change in the near future.

There has been a lot of information about "AI," some of it accurate, some not. Besides the disinformation, I'm not worried about the technology itself but how it will be used (or misused). I expect we'll get a better picture of this over the next few years.

I'd be happy to talk with anyone if they have questions. You can reach me at dgs@umich.edu.



Volunteer Corner

by Annemarie Howse

*Indra's
Jewel Net*



Indra's Jewel Net, located on the back wall of our sanctuary, represents the connections and community among Interfaith members, friends, and beyond. Anyone who has a connection to the Interfaith Center may choose a jewel. Most of those connected with Interfaith have already done this and their jewel has been added to the net. The invitation remains open to those who are new or returning to the center and wish to do so. To continue this practice, we could use a couple/few volunteers to assist.

This is how you can help:

1. Create the "jewel" - By fastening jewels to a wire you will create a jewel drop that can then be added to the net. Materials will be provided, and Rev. Lyriel Claire will explain how to do this and be available for guidance as needed.
 2. Assist with the jewel selection- Sit at a table in the social hall for a few minutes before and/or after the service to help people choose a jewel to represent them on Indra's net. You will be provided with instructions and the form for the individual to fill out. You do not have to do this every week, once or twice a month would be sufficient.
- For more information on Indra's Jewel Net, please visit our website: <https://interfaithspirit.org/you-are-a-jewel/>



Volunteer Highlight

Layla Ananda has been a dedicated volunteer at Interfaith for many years. She works behind the scenes to keep our website vibrant and up to date.

She serves as the chair of our communications team, and is part of our tech team (camera). She offers "Singing for Comfort" on the second Thursday of the month and frequently offers her gift of music and song at Sunday services.

I could not help but notice that on December 8 she was our guest musician and operated the online cameras as well; flawlessly. At another Sunday service in December, she jumped in at the last minute to provide a meditation when there was a glitch in the schedule and the meditation leader did not appear. As if on cue, she simply stood up, quietly walked up to the lectern, and delivered. Layla is truly one of our "jewels."

In January 2024, in recognition of our 25-year anniversary, a Volunteer Appreciation (3 ring binder) was published with a list of all those that volunteered in 2023 along with many photos. A great number of those individuals still volunteer today. In addition, here is a list of volunteers that joined our volunteer team in 2024:

- The Board added three new members: Cristo Bowers, Lance Clark, and Dawn Swartz.
- Greeters: Julia Braden, Janet Fry, Craig Harvey, Todd Johnson, Mark Maxwell, and Roberta Maxwell.
- Welcome Table: Barb Fisher, Sandy Hill, Cooper Holland, Bob Hopkins, Bethany King, and Norah Reilly.
- Readers and Meditators: Parina Bowers, Jill Crane, Dick Durham, Craig Harvey, Todd Johnson, and Randy Rousse. Norah Reilly stepped up to be the coordinator of readers and meditators.
- Newsletter Team: Annemarie Howse, Bethany King, and Norah Reilly.

If you'd like information about volunteering, you can reach me at ahowse21@gmail.com or call or text me at 818-667-2815 (leave a message).

Racist continued from page 1

After that I made a point of smiling, saying hi, and going out of my way to hold the door open for people, especially if they were black. I would feel so proud of myself when I did these things, and it helped to reassure me that I genuinely had good intentions towards everyone, equally, but especially if they were black!



One morning, as I walked into Walgreens, a truck with two white men parked next to me. It felt obvious to me they were up to no good. I felt so strongly that I told the cashier she should not be alone while those men were around. Afterwards, I wondered, would I have told the cashier about my gut feeling if the men had been black or would I have kept it to myself from fear of her thinking I was profiling black men?

Now I understand my fear in college, my attempt to somehow redeem myself through exaggerated manners, and that I will always tell someone if I think they are in danger! I know it does not matter if I think my intent is good, bad, or indifferent; when my action (or lack of action) is determined solely by someone's "race," it is RACISM. I know it is racism because when I'm confronted with scenarios like these, I try not to get defensive, so I can sit in these spaces that sometimes feel uncomfortable and try to determine the source of that discomfort.

While I know I did not do anything to intentionally cause these disparities, they undoubtedly, undeniably exist! Therefore, it is my responsibility to find and listen to voices and experiences that are different than mine. Whenever I afford myself the luxury of being defensive instead of listening, I miss the opportunity to hear someone's point of view. And while I may not be able to solve this for everyone right now, for one person, just being listened to may start a small healing process.

I learned a few other things in that small town.

I learned there is no higher purpose for us than to love our neighbors as ourselves. There was also this part about loving your enemies so that pretty much covers the gamut.

I learned that "above all, we are to love each other deeply because love covers a multitude of sins."

That doesn't even have to cover MY multitude of sins or the OTHER's multitude of sins! So, whose "sins" would it cover?

I learned that there are usually three sides to every story.

I also heard stories about Jesus making a point of bringing people into the story who were considered outsiders. That was not a one-off thing; he did that all the time! ... It's like he was trying to tell us something.

I know it is my responsibility to be anti-racist because, as a kid, every Sunday morning, my pastor said I was responsible for my sins of commission, doing things I shouldn't have, as well as my sins of omission "leaving undone that which ought to have been done." Therefore, it is not enough to not be racist. I must be actively working to eliminate racism on every level possible and that begins inside me.

Finally, I learned to keep promises. And I made an important promise to that elementary school girl the day she learned about bystander apathy that I will not break. I will not be too busy working or shopping or judging to be anti-racist. And, if need be, I will encourage my neighbors, my family, and maybe even my church to do better.

Because hindsight being so clear and all...

We are a relatively young country, "an experiment in Democracy." We could easily become irrelevant and collapse as a functioning nation if we all check out and quit listening to opposing viewpoints. From the beginning, our strength has been our diversity; we cannot afford to be complacent.

Bethany edited this article from the original Facebook post which she wrote in 2021.

My hope at that time was it would grab the attention of some of the people who I knew would read it and encourage them to rethink some of their own beliefs. It essentially ended up being a glance into my limited understanding of racism, a journey of growth and learning that I am still on.

Bethany



Yoga for Healthy Aging Beginners Mind

By Jennifer Lenders

"That's the challenge as we meet life's challenges: not to let the injury or limitation of one thing injure or limit all things. Not to let the opening of a new depth be filled before it reveals its secrets and its gifts." Mark Nepo, Seven Thousand Ways to Listen.

How do we continue to thrive, have joy, and grow when life brings great challenge? This question I remember first asking when I was about 11 years old. Maybe not in so many words, but in the ways that fear gripped my young mind when I could not help my mother heal from depression or my parents from divorce. How was I to live a healthy and joyful life—when it seemed elusive or impossible?

It seems the question has driven much of my actions throughout life since and continues to inspire me to learn what it is to be human and alive in this body. A potent experience of loss in the physical body was this past year when I was met with the challenge and pain of frozen shoulder. We are asked to reassess, remodel, and renew the trajectory of life when a significant change takes place in the body. To listen deeply to the currents pulling us in a new direction and our resistance at the same time to be challenged on how to live within the new parameters. What is life asking of us now? How can I love myself more when my sense of self, or what I thought was myself, must change into something different? What has my heart been longing for that has not been given space or time to fulfill? When I asked my shoulder for wisdom, I wondered what was wanting to be seen.

I approached this through letting go of what I think I know. I don't know anything. I'm open to learning a new way. I'm curious and childlike. I let go of my need to know already. No expectations. A beginner's mind.

A beginner's mind allows us to refresh, renew, and restore our senses to possibility and an awakened state of openness. Where we might be drawn to see limitation, impossibility, and confusion, beginner's mind gives us the state of all paths not traveled and an equal opportunity. Eliminating the pathways of

conditioned action, we proceed to the place of sweetness that says your old ways won't help you here; you need to find a new teacher in the present moment.

A conscious movement practice can employ the new teacher in the present moment by movement that is exploratory and led by interoception or internal sensational awareness.

The new teacher within is a deeply authentic one. There's no room to copy another's path. To force ourselves into the old path, like a square peg in a round hole. The authenticity comes from embracing our own path and hearing what is true beyond the chatter of other well-meaning souls in our lives, beyond the expectations that old actions will bring the same fulfillment. Our authentic self may listen to possibilities, suggestions, and opportunities to try new things— but it knows that it may be a solution that only we can understand in the heart of our own heart.

Wisdom says that no one can tell us exactly what we need in body, heart, and mind. We may have many wise elders, teachers, mentors, and friends with important messages— but the resonance of truth only sounds when our own mind and heart ring out with a "yes" of recognition and peaceful surrender to knowing ourselves well.

It's not always clear. But beginner's mind brings us to a moment of stillness and emptiness in which fear and uncertainty can be acknowledged, appreciated, and given space while we courageously move forward into the mystery. Beginner's mind allows us to feel the pain or loss present and turn our ear towards our life that is speaking to us tenderly and insistently. To pause, stop, look inward, reevaluate, and love. To love ourselves more deeply.





I Love Interfaith!

by Jean Wilson

I have been coming here for about 12 years now, starting when I moved to Saline when my husband was transferred to the Evangelical Home

following his last stroke. I was truly feeling like I was out in outer space, really alone, as I watched my longtime sweetheart slowly fade away. I desperately needed to go inside to find myself and peace.

Nothing made sense at church. The prayers and hymns didn't speak to me anymore. In quiet defiance, I started changing the words to songs and prayers and that at least made me feel better! My journaling and meditation evolved into questions, considerations, and possibilities. I kicked up my yoga routine, and that really helped open my physical being to the metaphysical world even more. Also, I intensified my reading, picking up Science of Mind and delving into other authors, questioning so much of what I'd been taught, specifically the dogmas that no longer made sense, the concepts that were anything but inclusive. The old beliefs I'd been taught were now clothes that didn't fit anymore.

It was in the middle of all this, that one Sunday, when I wasn't playing the organ or directing the choir, that I came to Interfaith. It became my lifeline. The meditation grabbed me and took me deep. I got wonderfully lost. And my new journey, new joy, started. I was ready to come here. And I keep coming because it's home for my soul.

There are so many things I've learned and will keep learning from reading, talking, listening at the Center, spending time with the wonderful, enlightened friends I've met. The support and love are incredible. I appreciate not only this journey itself but also knowing that we are all on different paths, each uniquely special. It's pure joy. I know it's like life, though – not always pretty – but I know for sure that love reigns at Interfaith, above all.

As I write this and remember those past days and how I am fed at Interfaith, the Spirit wells up inside me. It's been like unwrapping something amazing at Christmas and every day since. Limitless. That's why Dr. Bob dances! I am so grateful for this family of friends, the shared gentle caring leadership, and to Dave Bell for his

hugs and words of wisdom during some of those really tough days. (Do it in love! Do everything in love!)

I hope I can be there for others as you have been there for me.

Thank you!

You know, I'll be with you all forever!

Namaste



Goodbye to a Robin

by Peggy Lubahn

Yesterday, my neighbor called me over to help an injured Robin. It was very weak but could still hold its head up as I wrapped my hands around it to warm it up. I held the bird for a while and talked to it softly. I've helped several birds who've been dazed after flying into my apartment windows; they usually perk up after a few minutes. But this bird was very different.

You can see from the photo that the beak is discolored, malformed, and the tip is bent. It's possible the bird flew into a window; my neighbor found it on the ground. It might also be a genetic condition.



You might be able to see the teeny white spot at the base of the bill on the right side. I think it might be a parasitic bird mite (they feed on a bird's blood or feathers), which could explain the bird's weakness.

The bird passed after about fifteen minutes. I was sad, of course, but at least he felt some love and compassion when he needed it the most.

I washed my hands carefully several times when I got home, just in case.

AUTHOR BIO

Peggy River Singer is a Pleiadian Starseed, Lightworker, all-beings communicator, faerie ally, and lifelong writer. More of her articles and channelings are posted on angelsfairiesandlife.wordpress.com. To request a reading, please call 734-548-0194.

JANUARY SPECIAL EVENTS



Community Sing with Matt Watroba

Wednesday, January 8
7:00-8:30 pm

Donations of \$5-10 each suggested. Much appreciation for those who have become sponsors of this event.



Cafe 704 presents ... Peter Madcat Ruth & John Churchville With Special Guest Emily Slomovits

Saturday, January 11

7:00-9:00 pm
(doors open at 6:30 pm)

Tickets: \$10.00-in person or on zoom.
<https://interfaithspirit.org/cafe-704-coffeehouse/>



Madcat Ruth and John Churchville

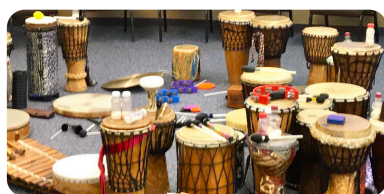
Madcat Ruth

Madcat's experience is extensive. He has been singing and playing harmonica and ukulele for over 60 years, and he's been a professional touring and recording musician since 1970. He's played in rock bands, blues bands, and folk groups, and for four years he toured worldwide with renowned jazz pianist Dave Brubeck. His harmonica can be heard on over 130 CDs and LPs.

John Churchville

John Churchville is a master percussionist who specializes in Indian tabla drums, but also plays many other percussion instruments. He is also a music teacher in the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Together they play an eclectic blend of music. Blues, Folk music, American Roots music, Jazz, and World Music are all part of the mix.



Drummmunity Drum Circle with Lori Fithian

Saturday, January 18
7:00-9:00 pm

Donations are appreciated.



Imbolc
PAGAN CHANT SING-ALONG
Led by Nora Farley

Sunday, January 26

7:30-9:00 pm

Scan for a song sheet with the lyrics and links to recordings.



Come celebrate the halfway point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox with music from Earth-based spiritual traditions. Feel free to bring your own instrument if you have one! All ages, spiritualities, and musical abilities welcome!

Donations to Interfaith are appreciated.