



# Interfaith Inspirer

An Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth News Publication



## Soul Family: The People You Find Along the Way

By Parina Bowers

As the holidays draw near, I find myself thinking about family—not just the one I was born into,

but the one I've gathered piece by piece over the years.

For a long time, I thought family was defined by blood, by last names, by shared childhoods. But life—especially a life lived far from home and outside the traditions in which I was raised—taught me otherwise. My connection with my blood family has grown distant; our paths have taken different turns, and I no longer belong to their circle. That loss left an empty space, but into that space walked something unexpected and beautiful: my soul family—the ones who carry me through this life, day after day.

In this season of my life, my soul family is my community at the Interfaith Center, my husband Cristo, friends who show up without being asked, and coworkers whose kindness and wisdom have helped me grow in ways I couldn't have managed alone.

When you live in a foreign country, there's a quiet ache for the voices, places, and inside jokes you left behind. At first, every connection feels fleeting, like it could never match what you once had. But slowly, people step into your life and start to feel like home. The coworker who notices when your shoulders slump and leaves tea on your desk. The neighbor who brings soup when you're sick. The friend who

sits with you in a crowded café and becomes the one you trust most.

Rumi wrote, *"Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along."* That's how it feels with soul family—you don't need decades to build the bond; you just recognize them, like remembering a song you used to know.

These are the people who remind you of your strength when you've forgotten it, who challenge you to grow and hold space for you when the world feels heavy. Gandhi said, *"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."* Soul family lives this truth—giving without keeping score, and inspiring you to do the same.

The beauty is, these bonds can stretch across oceans and years without breaking. You can go months without speaking and still pick up right where you left off.

Living abroad has taught me that home is not always a place—it's the warmth in someone's eyes, the laughter that feels like an old song, the deep comfort of being known.

This holiday season, I'm grateful for my soul family—the ones who see me, steady me, and make even faraway places feel like home.



## ICSG Annual Thanksgiving Potluck Dinner

Thursday, November 27, at 1:00 pm  
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## Meet... Layla Ananda Finding Harmony in Spirit and Song

by Norah Reilly  
Chat GPT assisted

This month, we're delighted to introduce Layla, a beloved member of the Interfaith Center community whose life is a beautiful blend of music, mindfulness, and heartfelt connections.

Born in Detroit in 1950, Layla has built a life filled with music, good friends, and personal and spiritual growth. From her childhood home on Littlefield between Six Mile and Puritan to her welcoming smile at the Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth, her story reflects a lifelong search for harmony—within herself and with others.

"I realized after I retired that I've had four intertwined careers," she says with a laugh. A musician by training, Layla spent years performing and writing music for children and families when her daughter was young. Before and after that, she earned a graduate degree in psychology and worked as a psychotherapist, helping people navigate life's challenges.

Community and education have always been part of her rhythm. She managed student and food co-ops, served as Executive Director of the North American Students of Cooperation, and later taught psychology at Washtenaw Community College. Through it all, she led workshops and programs that encouraged growth and self-discovery. "Each chapter was about helping people—and myself—learn, grow, and find peace," she says. Layla was raised in Conservative Judaism, attending synagogue, teaching Sunday school, and celebrating her Bat Mitzvah. "You don't ever stop being Jewish," she says. But her spiritual path has expanded over time. "I've studied different teachers and traditions," she explains. "When I found the Interfaith Center, it felt like home—a place where all seekers are welcome."

Since joining in 2017, Layla has become a vibrant part of the community. "I love how welcoming everyone is," she says. "Between the potlucks, the welcome table, and the many events, there are so many ways to connect."

Music, for Layla, has always been sacred. "Music was what felt like real religion to me growing up,"



she says. "It takes me to a peaceful, loving place." She leads Singing for Comfort, sings at Sunday services, and is part of the Threshold Singers, who offer gentle songs for people in hospice care and others in need of comfort. She also performs with Our Own Thing Chorale, a group dedicated to performing African American music. "I feel honored to be

part of that group," she says. "Singing makes my heart sing."

Meditation is another touchstone in her life. Influenced by Ram Dass and his teacher Neem Karoli Baba (Maharaj-ji), Layla finds strength in remembering that she is "a spiritual being, not just a mind and body." Meditation, she says, helps her manage anxiety and depression—something she speaks about openly. "There's still a stigma," she says, "but it's just part of being human. Focusing on my breath reminds me of who I really am."

At the Center, Layla serves on the leadership team, is our webmaster and is part of the tech team on camera for Sunday services and other events. Layla also serves on the new Resolution Committee, helping the community strengthen communication and compassion. "We want to create awareness around how to speak with kindness, even when we're upset," she says. "Sometimes it's as simple as saying, 'Let's take a breath.'"

Layla and her husband Mark have been together for nearly fifty years—a relationship she describes as a beautiful evolution. "Some people get divorced and find a new partner," she says with a smile. "We just kept creating new relationships with each other." When she needs grounding, she turns to nature. "Being among the trees, sitting by water—that's where I find peace."

Through her music, mindfulness, and open heart, Layla brings warmth and wisdom to everyone she meets. "I think we're all loving people," she says. "But we're also human. The more we can practice peace and kindness—even when it's hard—the better this world will be."



## Ministerial Miscellany Three Words by Rev. Annie Kopko

Three words have kept coming to me for weeks: "Protect your heart." Then I started wondering :

how do we do that? I started to do a little research. To my surprise, this is a Bible verse from Proverbs 4:23: "Guard your heart for everything you do flows from it." This passage is in the Old Testament, and the rest of the advice is about how to lead a wise life. It is part of passages titled: "Get wisdom at any cost."

Personally, I think the best way to protect your heart is to turn your heart to love and to be loving to everyone, known and unknown, near and far, no matter who they are. When we see the word "protect", we think, fortify against threats of any kind. But I think it is too easy to decide that we shouldn't include everyone. Well, yes, we should. Kurt Vonnegut Jr. reminds us, "Be soft, do not let the world make you hard. Do not let the bitterness steal your sweetness."

As we turn towards love, we will eventually turn toward things we don't like. Have gratitude, especially for the things that are difficult. When we honor those things that we object to, we gain the resilience to take on anything and anyone. It really helps to take time to trust that energy of our divine self as a core strength that never fails us. Here are some words from The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye."

Be happy, be grateful, and  
you WILL be Blessed.

Annie



*Enjoy the little things, for one  
day you may look back and  
realize they were the big things.*

Robert Brault

## Happy Birthday

November 1 Susan Thompson  
November 2 David Snyder  
November 4 Holly Makimaa  
November 4 Sally Searls  
November 6 Carol Perrault  
November 7 Bethany King  
November 8 Cathy DeLauter  
November 15 Bob Hopkins  
November 16 Jana Healy  
November 18 Laura Baris  
November 21 Anna Marie Henrich  
November 26 Al Carter



## Haiku from Dexter

by Barb Fisher, Sandy Hill  
and Cooper Holland

Leaves dancing  
across  
pavement

Choreographed  
by the wind

Graceful,  
chaotic beauty





## Grandma's Unconditional Love

by Lu Evergreen

The greatest human I've ever met is my grandmother. On January 22, 2013, she died 2 days before her 87th birthday after a few years of living with leukemia. Prior to going into a coma, she told my dad and me that she was tired and "ready to go." I couldn't blame her; she was strong but also had her own relationship with God that I could never claim to fully understand.

My grandparents lived close by growing up. As a child, my sisters and I got dropped off at their house on Friday nights where we would stay until the next day and enjoy Saturday morning cartoons before going home. My grandmother had a kind, peaceful presence and taught me what unconditional love is.

Losing her was devastating and I was a mess. I found comfort a week or so after she died when I had one of the most profound spiritual experiences of my life. I had a vision that I was rocketing upward through multiple dimensions of reality. In this out-of-body experience, I felt deeply that I was with my grandma, that we were both One with the Divine and that we were both okay.

I lived in her house after she passed and before my dad and his siblings sold it. One night, I was alone and felt lonely and she came to me. After the chain on the closet light fixture clanked against the bulb and the lights in the room flashed on and off, I passed it off as a breeze through the open window and an electrical issue. But then, the tissue box across the room flung onto the floor and at that point, there was no doubt in my mind that my grandma was there with me. Her presence made me smile and I felt less alone.

My grandma knew I was queer and met a former same-sex partner of mine. We only talked about it once and she told me that she would always love me. I didn't come out as nonbinary until after she died, but I know in my heart she would have accepted me. Actually, I know that she does accept me because even though she's not on this earthly plane, she has shown up since I recognized my trans identity, and I have felt her support.

In the days that followed December 28, 2023, once I got back home from the hospital in a state of both bliss and exhaustion after receiving gender affirming mastectomy surgery, my grandma was there with me! I felt her so strongly that it moved me to tears as I laid on the bathroom floor and the words "I'm here with you" energetically moved through me.

She last came to me in a dream sometime within the last 6 months. She found out that I started testosterone for gender affirmation purposes (which I did in real life a year ago) and I was nervous about her knowing until she said to me, "I love and support you no matter what."

While I thought I understood what unconditional love was from receiving it from my grandma while she was alive, I don't think I fully understood the true meaning until after her passing. Unconditional love is known as an unchanging love that has no bounds. I have learned that boundless love is infinite, going beyond space and time, from the immaterial to the material and back, unlimited in scope and at times difficult to comprehend. While my grandmother may not be in this realm, her love will always remain with me.

## Love Like the Seasons

by Monique Caldwell

Through winter's hush and summer's blaze,  
Our love endures the shifting days.  
Born of laughter, rooted deep,  
In friendship's soil, its promise keeps.

When storms arrive and tempests roar,  
We hold the line, we mend, restore.  
Not fleeting like a springtime bloom,  
But steady as the autumn moon.

We bend like trees in April rain,  
Yet rise again, despite the strain.  
In every season, joy or pain,  
We find the sun, we start again.



No frost can freeze what we have grown,  
No drought can crack this love we've known.  
For hearts that first were friends, then more –  
Are built to last, through every war.





## Volunteer Corner

by Annemarie Howse

### The Caring Committee Welcomes Four New Members

During the past year, four new people have joined our Caring Committee. Please give a warm welcome to Marice Clark (who joined us in January), Linda Rykwald (in May), Ryan O'Reilly (in September), and Norah Reilly (in October).

Membership of the Committee is voluntary. The level and type of activity is determined by the individual member with each one drawing on their strengths and comfort level (making phone calls, visiting folks in the hospital, providing transportation to the center or doctor's office, etc.). The committee may seek assistance from the Interfaith community or refer to external services when necessary.

If you have a need, you may reach out to someone on the Caring Committee. Their names and contact information are in the Sunday bulletin and on our website, [interfaithspirit.org](http://interfaithspirit.org). The level of confidentiality is determined by the person requesting assistance (for example, an announcement can be made that you need help moving or your need can be held in confidence by committee members).

The mission of the Caring Committee is to assist individuals or families primarily within the community of the Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth, and selectively support activities in the larger community.

If you would like to join the Caring Committee, please contact Marilyn Alf, the Chairperson at [sdtoaa@gmail.com](mailto:sdtoaa@gmail.com) or a member of the committee. For other volunteer opportunities, please contact Annemarie Howse, our volunteer coordinator at [ahowse21@gmail.com](mailto:ahowse21@gmail.com) or txt 818-667-2815.



## ICSG Annual Thanksgiving Potluck Dinner

Thursday, November 27, at 1:00 pm



Turkey will be provided by the Caring Committee. Please bring a side dish or dessert.

- Set-up crew will need to arrive at 12:00.
- Guests should arrive by 12:45 for mingling and to find the appropriate space on the buffet line for your shared dish.
- If your dish requires any preparation (reheating, slicing etc.) we ask that you arrive a bit earlier.
- Dinner will be at 1:00 pm.

Please go to [mealtrain.com/146rnw](http://mealtrain.com/146rnw) or use the QR code to sign up and let us know what you will bring and if you would like to assist with set-up and/or clean-up.

There will also be a signup sheet at the center near the greeting station and welcome table.



## A Conversation With “Indy” the Raccoon

by Peggy River Singer

Recently, I heard a mob of birds shrieking and squawking in a woodsy corner of my apartment’s property. I headed that way, thinking they were probably harassing a hawk, and then I looked down, and there in the middle of the path was a small animal skull. Right out in plain sight, where anyone could have seen it or stepped on it.

Remember that scene in Raiders of the Lost Ark where Indiana Jones gets up close to the golden idol on its altar and his eyes get real big? That’s what it felt like.

I asked permission to take the skull and heard Yes. I posted photos on Nextdoor, and a member who runs a raccoon rescue told me the skull belonged to a raccoon who had died of old age. That’s not so common for wild animals living among people, so I decided to offer a conversation.

**Indy:** I perceive the image in your mind, and I am pleased to be named for the dashing hero of your entertainments!

**Peggy:** You must have died many years ago; did your soul-self decide you wanted me to find your skull, or would another human have been equally suitable?

**Indy:** I and other creatures of the area knew you could use my skull to help others learn.

**Peggy:** Did another human place the skull where I found it?

**Indy:** Yes, hoping it would be put to good use. To make sure you found my skull, that person, the birds, and I worked together on a soul level.

**Peggy:** Did you spend your life in this neighborhood?

**Indy:** Yes, the combination of human dwellings, river, and forests offers lots of opportunities.

**Peggy:** Were you male or female in your final lifetime?

**Indy:** Female, about ten summers of life. I lived with other elder females, we shared memories and jokes and helped teach young ones how to BE Raccoon in all our elemental glory.

Many humans see us as comical, playful Trash Bandits. You understand from a previous writing (A Conversation with Raccoon Group Soul) that we devote our lives and energies to balance.

Our paws are extremely sensitive, which helps us locate areas of disturbance. Our embodied energies allow us to offer healing through the soles of our feet.

Our tracks in the snow and soil express our unique way of healing earth and soil and plants and the creatures of the soil. Notice where we pause, which way we turn, which direction we take, and you will often find areas requiring balancing.

**Peggy:** Is this like a “background function” as you go through your day?

**Indy:** We can choose to offer balancing/healing, yes; but every step, every item we pick up to examine, provides some level of assistance without requiring conscious effort.

**Peggy:** Your people love fruits so it’s common to see the seeds in your poop. Are those seeds empowered in some way by passing through your bodies?

**Indy:** Yes indeed, they are infused with vibrant energies that help the plants that sprout from those seeds to grow in good health. The fruits and other parts of those plants are also infused, and so the cycle continues.

**Peggy:** What else would you like us to know about you and your life today?

**Indy:** A skull represents the knowledge and wisdom acquired in one’s lifetime. It’s important for that knowledge and wisdom to be shared so it is not forgotten. You have three stone skull friends. I hope to join their company so I can offer insights and advice and perhaps a few more writings for you. May it be so.

**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](http://angelsfairiesandlife.wordpress.com). To request a session, please call 734-548-0194.





## Small Gratuities

by Beth Wheland

I often feel gratitude for the people in my life, the roof over my head, the many blessings of my life. But there have been days when the pleasures I was able to receive were much smaller than the ones I just named. The pleasure I took this day from eating a juicy, peak-perfect Minneola orange reminded me of days when the only pleasure I could find was in walking to the store and buying and ingesting a chocolate milk and an in-season orange.

That small, sensual experience was enough. It got me through one day, so I did it again the next day, and the one after that. It gave me a lift. I remember thinking that perhaps, just maybe, I was still capable of enjoying life's small pleasures. I remember crying when I had that thought. I cried tears of gratitude to know that, in my heart, which I had been feeling as irreparably broken, I still had the capacity for joy.

Thanks for the memory, Minneola.



When asked what they are most grateful for, this is how some members of our Interfaith community responded.

I love my daily walks in the lovely parks here in Ann Arbor. Watching the seasons pass through the different wildflowers and birds coming in and out, feeling autumn through the scent of leaves on the ground and making friends with the stillness of winter after 25 years away, all this makes me happy. – Susan Slack

Kittens and cats. – Lyriel Claire

Having you as a friend. – Jack Koepfgen

Hearing birds singing makes my heart glad. I love to work in my garden at sunset because the birds are very animated as they settle down for the night--getting their last feeding in and finding their favorite branch or hidey hole. I'm a "crepuscular" kind of person and I think sunset is magical. – Vicki Davinich

Getting hugs at Interfaith. All sorts of singing, dancing and drumming events. Game nights with family and chatting them up in the process. Hearing the words "I love you". – Bob Hopkins



## Helping to End Hunger in Washtenaw County

Have you wondered why we have that big barrel inside the doorway to the Social Hall? It's how we collect non-perishable foods to help hungry people living in Washtenaw County. While grocery shopping, please consider purchasing a bit extra of canned and packaged staples, to bring to the Center and feed our barrel. When the barrel is full, Rob Fagerlund, our Food Barrel Chief, will contact Food Gatherers for a pickup.

Food Gatherers is the food bank and food rescue program that serves Washtenaw County. Although they accept donations of perishable and non-perishable foods, as well as non-food items, we ask that you only add non-perishable foods to our collection barrel. It may take a few weeks to fill the barrel.

Cleaning out your pantry at home? According to the Food Gatherers website, they will accept canned and dry goods that are unopened and in their original packaging, labeled with ingredients and allergens, in good condition (no dents, bulging or rust), within 1 year past the use-by date.

If you would like to donate personal care items, cleaning supplies, fresh food, produce and meats, please contact Food Gatherers directly. Their contact information is [info@foodgatherers.org](mailto:info@foodgatherers.org) or 734-761-2796.

For more information about our food barrel or to learn how you can help, please contact Rob Fagerlund, our Food Barrel Chief at [rob.fagerlund@interfaithspirit.org](mailto:rob.fagerlund@interfaithspirit.org)



# November Special Events



## Cafe 704 presents ...

**Billy King, Emily & Stan Slomovits, and Jen Sygit**

**Celebrating the Songs of Joni Mitchell**

**Saturday, November 8 - 7:00-9:00 pm**

Emily and San Slomovits, Billy King and Jen Sygit will sing and play songs from Joni Mitchell's career, and accompany themselves on guitars, violin, mandolin, bass and piano.



*Billy King    Emily & Stan Slomovits    Jen Sygit*

**Tickets: \$10.00-\$20.00 (sliding scale). If attending in person - pay at the door. Doors open at 6:30.**

**If attending on zoom - purchase tickets online at <https://interfaithspirit.org/cafe-704-coffeehouse/>**



## Community Sing with Matt Watroba

*the voice of folk music in Michigan*

**Wednesday, November 12    7:00-8:30 pm**

**Your donations make this event possible.**

**For more information about Matt, go to [mattwatroba.net](http://mattwatroba.net)**

## The Spirit Singing Band presents...

**Kath Weider, Sam Clark, Dan Bilich, Lori Fithian & Friends**

**Friday, November 14**

**7:00 pm - doors open at 6:30**

**Tickets \$10-\$20 suggested donation.**

*Bring your voices!  
song prayers  
folk jamming  
circle singing*



Seating is limited to 100. Pre-registration is suggested. Come early and pay at the door.

Use the QR code or go to: [rsvp.church/r/pl4u8k12](https://rsvp.church/r/pl4u8k12) to reserve your spot.



## Drummmunity Drum Circle

**with Lori Fithian**

**Saturday, November 15 - 7:00-8:30 pm**

**Lori brings her drums and percussion instruments. You get to play them. No experience needed, just a joyful heart and a willingness to participate.**



**Donations are appreciated.**