

The Quarterly (name TBD)

Winter Edition - "Awakenings"



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY

| December 2013

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of the Shenandoah Valley**

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Members and Friends,

Welcome to the newest publication of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Shenandoah Valley. This publication is very different from other communication outlets. The weekly email announcements and Sunday newsletter primarily enable the office and church leaders to communicate news and information to you. This is your publication. It's your vehicle for sharing information, opinion, poetry and prose with each other.

This will be published online quarterly, and we will do our best to accommodate readers without access to the internet. Guidelines for submissions are printed elsewhere. Please take a look at them. This is not an open, social forum—although the Communications Committee is working on that, too. We expect submissions to honor our covenant and promises, and that means our editors must exercise some judgment when accepting or rejecting submissions. For a non-creedal community such as ours, that's not an easy task. We'll be just fine, though, if we all approach this venture in good faith and with open hearts and minds.

This new publication is more than just another communications outlet. It's an expression of our faith. Submissions are welcome from everyone, including those who may have different voices than those we regular feature in our worship services and other programming or who have constructive criticism of our church. Can you imagine any other faith group creating a space for critical inquiry and such diverse voices? This new publication is as much about who we are as it about what we're doing and what's happening in our community.

In many ways, this project now is in your hands. The success of this publication depends on your willingness to share your writings in this forum. Please consider doing so. My thanks go to our editors, Libby Kronthal and Thom Potts, and to the members of the Communication Committee for all the work that has made this possible.

Paul

NEW BEGINNINGS: Exciting Perspectives From Your Board

Katie Mack, President, UUCSV Board of Directors

The first edition of our new quarterly publication heralds yet another change that you will notice at UUCSV. We look forward to reading the submissions from members who are eager to share their creativity and interests with our congregation.

In addition to this change, you have no doubt been noticing many other changes that are shaping the climate and activities of UUCSV. As our membership is growing we are able to meet and work with persons who arrive with new interests and ideas and a willingness to share these with our church. Along with this comes the opportunity for us to enjoy new experiences and pursuits that are now available. These come in the form of opportunities to engage directly in a wide variety of social action/justice volunteer activities, to connect to a greater degree with other supportive organizations in our local and regional communities, and to develop a deeper sense of commitment and belonging through the various forms of small group ministry in our own UUCSV church family.

Your UUCSV Board members are thrilled to be able to help work along with you to facilitate the growth and change that the membership wishes to support. We welcome your ideas and suggestions to make your membership at UUCSV become even more meaningful. Feel free at any time to offer your ideas to any of us: Katie Mack, Joe Schad, Dick Dugan, Owen Lowe, Mary Dale Jackson, Liz England, and Ann Cross. Together we can all proudly create an even greater UUCSV presence in the Valley.



What's in a Name?

Thom Potts

Shakespeare may have insisted “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” but we’re a little more picky when it comes to our new quarterly publication, the first issue of which you are enjoying right now.

As you may remember, earlier in the fall we announced a contest to find an appropriate name for this new voice of UUCSV. We had envisioned something catchy, something clever, something that would stand out and make people want to delve into our publication’s content.

So far, we’ve received a number of excellent suggestions. How about “Voice of the Valley”? Or does “Connections” appeal to you more? Or what if we called it “Our Spirit”? (And these are just three of numerous possibilities that our members have submitted.)

Where do we go from here? Well, we will continue to take suggestions for our publication’s name through December 31, 2013. So, let your creativity flow and send your idea for an inventive name to me at thompotts@gmail.com. If you’ve already submitted a name or two, no worries: you’re welcome to submit even more. In January, we’ll conduct an anonymous survey of UUCSV to select the winner, and our spring issue, nameless no more, will proudly carry our congregation’s chosen title.

In the meantime, all of us – the Communications Committee, Libby Kronthal and I as layout and content editors, and our many talented contributors – hope that you enjoy this, our inaugural issue!

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Thom Potts is the content editor of the new as-yet-named quarterly publication that you are currently reading.

Testimonial

Norma Riley

On Sunday, Nov. 3, the Caring Committee was highlighted in the morning service. The committee is seeking new volunteers to help out with different jobs, such as sending cards, providing food, offering transportation, or making visits to shut-ins. Dottie Cox and Norma Riley are the co-chairs of the committee and made short presentations during the service. Following is the text of Norma's talk for those who were not there.

I can attest to this: Our congregation is very caring. My family and I have received so much love and support over the years it's beyond measure.

A long list of you have brought meals and an even longer list has sent cards, which meant so much. Many of you have driven me to appointments when Russ could no longer drive.

Many of you helped us move in 2006—thanks again for that!

Many of you visited us in the hospital or at home.

You were here for us for Russ's Celebration of Life two years ago, being supportive and making sure we had a lovely gathering.

I am grateful for so many blessings from this congregation.

One of the things I have learned about life is that humans need to feel useful. That has been an important theme in my life along with caring about others and helping people along life's journey. So when I could in the past and when I can in the present, I like to help out however I can. I resonate with the UU minister that said, "Just because I can't do everything, that will not stop me from doing the one thing I can."

I will forever owe you a debt of gratitude—and do my best to help you in return.

Anyone interested in joining Norma in doing what you can is invited to become a part of the Caring Committee. Please contact Norma Riley or Dottie Clark for more information.

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After a long career in education and other activities, Norma Riley has time in her retirement to return to her love of producing art. She is taking lessons in watercolor painting and learning many things. She tells friends, "Grandma Moses started late, so it's not too late for Grammy Riley."



By the Creek Side
Norma Riley
Watercolor

New Member Bios



Teri Merrill

Teri Merrill moved with her husband and two children to Winchester from Dallas, TX, in the summer of 2009. She enjoys gardening and is a master gardener with the Virginia Cooperative Extension, which teaches the public about best gardening practices. She writes religion stories for the Winchester

Star, where she meets a variety of wonderful people with very different religious and spiritual backgrounds. She is also a board member of Winchester Education Foundation, dedicated to raising funds for the public schools in Winchester. Her daughter, Madeline, 22, is working as a high school counselor in Reidsville, NC; and her son, Hamilton, 19, is a freshman at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Her husband, Mark, works for Valley Health System in Winchester.

In speaking of the path that brought her to UUCSV, Teri says: "I realize I've been on a spiritual journey for a long, long time, possibly my entire life. My husband and I were both Catholic, and we raised our children as part of a Catholic church and school in Dallas. It was a vibrant and friendly church and school, and we were happy in that community. But I often wondered if there was something wrong with me, because I didn't have the faith that others there seemed to have. It took the move to Winchester, and the experience with a large and less friendly Catholic church, for me to start looking for a church home where I felt more energized and accepted. When I found the UUCSV last winter and attended a few services, I got goosebumps each time, because I had no idea there was a place where I could question, and doubt, and churn, and seek and be accepted as normal.

"It has been a wonderful discovery for me, and I am sure there will be even more to learn and discover as time goes on. Thank you for being so welcoming."



Kathy Lowry

Kathy Lowry knew about the UU faith and us a long time ago. Her mother took her to the UU Fairfax Church when she was a teenager. Kathy remembers her experience of trying to find the Sunday service at the Handley Library in the 80s. Michelle Worthing was a

neighbor for years and her daughter, Maryanne, swam with Michelle's twins in high school. She found us again and joined our congregation in May.

Kathy grew up in New Jersey, is celebrating 10 years of marriage this year, and has 3 grown children. She is an RN taking a leave from her profession. Her interests are gardening, yoga, maintaining a healthy life style, and reading. She is inspired by her recent read, 12-step Buddhist. Events at the Barns of Rose Hill are one of her favorite summer outings. She has attended many of Shell Fisher's meditation evenings and workshops. She participates in the Women's Circle group and has weeded and cleaned up with the grounds committee. She is looking forward to getting involved with the Volunteer Farm, other events at the church, and meeting members and friends of UUCSV.



Frank and Gloria Winn

Frank and Gloria Winn joined as members in July 2013. They have been attending UUCSV for about two years after moving from Albany, NY to Martinsburg, WV three years ago. They have two adult children: a son, Bogie, who is pursuing a BA in

hospitality management and a daughter, Paige, who is pursuing her master's degree in reading education.

Frank is an avid hunter of ducks, geese, deer, bear, rabbits and fishes. He is a runner/walker and a motorcycle enthusiast. Gloria likes to read mysteries, has just starting practicing yoga, and sings with the Berkeley Community Chorus. Gloria has a degree in English and a Master in Sociology with a long history of working in social services specializing in aging. Gloria is enjoying retirement. Frank has a PhD in psychology and is continuing his work as a social scientist in the public health sector, commuting by train four days a week to the beltway circle. Frank says this is his last career after serving in the Public Health Service assigned to the Coast Guard, NIOSH, and federal agencies dealing with substance abuse. He also was a faculty member in two master's degree programs for physician assistants.

Gloria and Frank are not new to Unitarian Universalism. They have been UU members for 26 years, including churches in Albany, NY, Greenville, NC (where Gloria was a president and board member), Rockville, MD, and Cincinnati, OH. In fact, they say our church is very similar in architectural style to the Cincinnati church, a fond memory. They are looking forward to meeting more UUs, especially those in the WV area.

The Unitarian Church, Our Religious Home

Claudia and Hubert Martin

We joined the Unitarian Church of Spokane, Washington, in 1957 in order to find suitable instruction for our three children. As a bonus, we also found our own religious home in Unitarian congregations. When we moved from Spokane to Richmond, VA, we arrived late Saturday night. Sunday morning immediately found us at the Richmond Unitarian Church, where we were warmly welcomed. Our children liked RE and grew up in the Unitarian spirit of free inquiry. We have been active members of three congregations and helped buy or build four church buildings. We joined UUCSV in 1973. It was a great adventure to build a congregation from the ground up.

What makes us convinced Unitarians? We wholeheartedly believe in the Seven Principles. They mean more to us than the Ten Commandments. These principles form a basis for all UUs to agree upon, regardless of individual spiritual beliefs and differences. We also adhere to the special covenant we recite in this church at every service. It was formulated by Charles Burwell, our esteemed senior member. It mentions caring for others three times in six lines: "Love is the Spirit of this Church," "to live together in peace" and "to help our neighbor."

It also speaks twice of the "quest for truth," and to "seek the truth in freedom." In Hubert and my beliefs, we continuously quest and seek the truth. For me there is no absolute dogma and rock solid truth, but knowledge of truth is ever expanding and changing with new facts in the field of all sciences and of philosophical insights. For us, the concept of truth is based on facts and reality. We are willing to change with new insights.

Poco's Christmas Star

By Claudia Martin

A dog is supposed to be man's best friend. Have you ever wondered, why it is then, that no dog is mentioned in the Christmas story? I offer this explanation: Maybe it simply was a very small dog. He did not get that much attention. Poco, our tiny, wire-haired dachshund, certainly thinks so. He has had a dream to prove it. He will tell you about this in his own words, I am only the translator:

"Hi my dear humans, far and near. A Merry tail wag to you! This is Poco Martin. You know I love you all! That is why I would like to share my recent dream with you. I know, most

We have no need for a personal deity, but rejoice in the spirit of life intrinsic in every particle, every atom, up to the vast galaxies, but especially in the manifestations of life on this planet from bacteria to blades of grass to the human mind. For us, spirituality is a function of physical reality and does not exist without the physical basis.

We believe that individual death is a necessary and welcome component of life, a process of renewal. Our atoms will be "recycled" in true UU fashion. Our only afterlife will be our deeds and misdeeds during our brief life. This we feel is a tremendous responsibility. We hope for understanding and forgiveness for our shortcomings.

The human creations of all forms of art, music, and literature have greatly added to our emotional involvement and enjoyment of the accomplishments of our fellow humans, and we are thankful for so many uplifting and comforting experiences. We deeply enjoy communion with nature which gives us renewal and comfort. We greatly respect our fellow animals.

And lastly, we believe in the basic goodness of human nature. Besides our family, our own lives have been blessed with many friendships and loving connections, many of them with fellow UUs. A sense of humor has carried us through life, a lightness of being, not taking life too dead seriously.

of the time it is terribly boring when somebody attempts to reiterate a dream. But this is the season for very special dreams, of sugar plums (yuck!), and so forth. So please, listen.

It was the night before Christmas, when all through the house, not a creature was stirring (I don't know about a mouse!). My mistress in her kerchief and I without my collar were neatly tucked in under the feather bed, which I allow her to share with me. I took a deep breath and promptly fell asleep, enveloped in darkness. In my dream suddenly a bright light was shining through the window and woke me up with a start. A brilliant, single star had appeared outside in the moonless night. I was drawn towards this star as if a

magic spell was cast over me. I had to follow that star. My little feet started a running motion, seemingly I had a long way to go in my commencing dream.

Without ever touching the ground I trotted all the way into the Holy Land! I tell you, it did not seem to be a very special place to me, highly overrated! Lots of desert and prickly thorns. In the distance I heard dogs bark and saw the welcome light of a fire. Cautiously I approached, dragging my belly on the scratchy sand. A whole pack of various dogs sat or slept around a campsite. Coming to think of it, there were also a number of smelly sheep. Some inconsequential humans handed a bottle around and yawned, never noticing little me. They were shepherds, but the dogs were doing the actual work of watching sheep. I was enthusiastically greeted by the dogs. They used the internationally accepted greeting ceremony of sniffing our mutual behinds. Very informative custom! I tell you, this is one of the things we dogs have over you people, we are not racist at all. White, black, speckled, sire or bitch, regular or a little queer, it is all the same to us.

I was permitted to crawl under a mother sheep's warm fleece. I must have fallen asleep for a while, but was rudely awakened again by another bright light in the sky. A bevy of otherworldly humans with wings hovered over the field. What will humans come up with next! The shepherds and the dogs crouched in fear. One of the shepherds exclaimed, "Holy Smoke, these must be angels." That broke the spell. So now at least we had a name for these critters. The angels commenced to sing with a beauty we had never heard before, sweet, bell-like sounds. "Be not afraid", they sang, "We bring you a message of joy. A very special little child has been born in a stable in Bethlehem. Go and see the wonder of this new life. There is Peace and Good Will on Earth." We dogs also felt great joy and lifted our chins up high to howl a howlelujah. I hope it was not our singing which drove the angels away, but they sure disappeared quickly into the sky again. The shepherds got up in a hurry, no longer sleepy at all. They told us dogs to "stay". Then they grabbed a few sheep cheeses and woolen blankets and ran off down the hill towards Bethlehem.

I picked up a bone which really belonged to our alpha dog, Borro. He kept this bone only for reasons of nostalgia, since he had no more teeth. We told the sheep to mind their own business. Keeping due distance, we slunk after the shepherds and reached the courtyard of the inn. We sniffed around the stable, assessing the situation, when the fat innkeeper burst out of the back door with a broom in hand. His intentions towards us were not amicable. Action was

required. In splendid cooperation, like a phalanx of Roman soldiers, we approached, bared our teeth and growled. Borro's toothless mouth looked especially menacing, a true gate of hell. The innkeeper retreated like the coward he was and slammed the door shut. Did you ever imagine that I could be so ferocious? I surprised myself.

We dogs now peeked inside the stable through the many gaps in the wooden slats. Our mood changed to one of quiet wonder. Inside the stable a man and a woman sat on a bale of straw, while a tiny baby lay in an animal crib. An old cow and a donkey slept in a corner. They all were bathed in an otherworldly light, the source of which I could not determine. The other dogs kept their respectful distance, their tails trembling slightly.

But I had to get closer. I dug down into the dirt around the stable wall and soon had a hole large enough for me to get inside. I heard the man call the woman Maria and she called him Joseph. The shepherds had assembled around the couple and shook hands with them. Maria hugged them. Some shepherds sniffed and others had tears running down their weathered faces when she took the baby out of the crib for them to see and even to hold. I always like to see it when people hug and touch each other. At such occasions my tail involuntarily wags like crazy in consent. The shepherds delivered their gifts. I laid Borro's bone next to Maria's foot, but she paid no attention, so I hid it in a pile of hay. No sense to waste a good bone! The shepherds left soon afterwards, promising to return. The other dogs had run back to watch their sheep.

I decided to assume the role of watch dog if I was needed, right here in the stable. I settled down between the cow's belly and the donkey's back, ready for a good night's sleep finally. But my ears perked up at the strange sound mixture of animal hooves clapping and little bells ringing. I barked alarm. Maria tried to shush me, not to wake the child, but the baby did not cry. He just looked at me with such a sweet smile, it made my innards tremble with emotion.

Suddenly the large carriage doors of the stable were pushed open. Three strange, large animals paraded in with a proud gait. Three human riders balanced precariously on their backs. One human was black, one white, one brownish. I was pleased to see human integration at work, they might slowly learn something from us dogs! The riders smelled of sweat and dust in spite of their bejeweled clothes. They ordered the animals to kneel. The men descended and stepped closer to the child. I growled my fiercest and was ready to bite anybody who was up to no

good. But the three riders got down on their knees the same as their animals. Another lesson for humans to learn! They adored the child in quiet awe and bowed their heads. They had brought awfully stinking gifts, which they called incense and myrrh, besides shining gold, which did not smell at all. The shepherds' gifts seemed more sensible to me. As a matter of fact, the cheese started to smell very tempting.

I wanted to be a gracious host and offered the animal nearest to me Borro's bone. But she said she was a vegetarian and would prefer a serving of hay. Well, there was plenty of that around. I introduced myself, telling her that I was Poco, a wire-haired dachshund. Good that she was kneeling down so that I could talk to her. Her name was Fatima and she said she was a camel. They had come from the Land of Morning, far, far East from the Holy Land. Their riders were three wise men, who had seen a brilliant star in the Western sky, which they felt compelled to follow.

I said that this was very strange, since I also had to follow a bright star, as if it was my destiny. Fatima told me that the star finally had stood still in the sky, right above the stable. I doubted that. It was such a dark and cloudy night, I had seen no stars at all anymore. However, I went outside to see for myself.

The clouds had cleared, and there, right above the stable, the brightest star of all the thousand stars in the night sky stood centered over this lowly stable. The most marvelous thing about this star was that it had a shiny tail. A tail!! Can you imagine that! Now I understood the purpose for my nighttime journey. I realized and felt it deep in my heart: I, little Poco, with my long tail, am an important part of this whole world. I am loved by the whole world. Our universe itself is joyfully wagging its tail, embracing us all, plants, animals, people, suns and planets, in a dance of infinite love. This is what people call Christmas! Wow!"

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Claudia Martin, a long-time Unitarian, has been a member of UUCSV for forty years. She is an accomplished writer of essays and short stories.

A Code in Sonnet

Kevin Frey

In sunlight and love we walk through our lives
 Along roads Fate flecks with pellets of rain
 Though lies will abound, truth always arrives
 Its vagrancies just, in perjury slain
 We seek flowing water that we can use
 When assailed by fire that burns up our skies
 Ne'er a pause we give, as we cry and lose
 Watery drops as tears burning our eyes
 Eternal rain may blaze trails down your face
 But the lightest touch will break up the clouds
 And, with no effort, you'll float up to space
 Provoked by love sent to break earthly shrouds
 With a future bright and warm like the sun
 Past raindrops dry up, and dark days are done

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Kevin Frey, a computer geek and web developer, was born in south central Pennsylvania but grew up in the Shenandoah Valley. He characterizes himself as someone who thinks too much and writes too little.



Catch the Breeze

Georgia Dennis
B&W photograph



Reflection on Reflection

Georgia Dennis
B&W photograph

Where I Come From

Georgia Dennis

I am from the phosphorescent fish in the deep
whispering cryptic secrets as they sleep
of a time when the earth was angry and black,
its scorching surface chapped and cracked.

I am from the sun and Luna moon,
their impenetrable presence, so large they loom.
Two silent sentinels guarding the sky,
urging the mind's eyes to chance its flight.

I am from the ephemeral awareness,
the treasure of our consciousness,
creative catharsis at its purest peak,
listening closely you'll hear it speak.

I am from the quaking oncoming storm,
a heavenly god, given form.
The jagged beads of silver rain,
dancing manically across the window pane.

I am from the worn creased folds of the map,
the one that reveals all the unmarked paths.
Hidden in the garden of my kin,
waiting serenely to be sought again.

I am from the electricity of an eye to an eye,
the mutinous thought of what it'd be to die.
In the midst of euphoria so righteous and good,
pondering a reflection yet to be understood.

I am from a frenzied thought on high.
The reality of circumstance floats right by.
Only a lonely provocation into a world of dread,
tempting though it may be to split the thread.

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Georgia Dennis has been a Unitarian Universalist since birth. She takes the reflective quality of the UU way of life and applies it to her photography and writing. She believes that the most powerful lens is the eye but the strongest faculty we possess is to empathize with all things. Without empathy the lens catches no light.

Change in Latitude Brings Change in Attitude

Teri S. Merrill

As the first signs of fall, my favorite season, arrive in the Valley, I find myself reflecting on how much I enjoy and look forward to the change in seasons. And as I reflect, I find myself considering how just a few years ago, I felt very far away from seasons in my daily life.

My husband, Mark, our two children, and I moved here a little over four years ago from Dallas, Texas, where he ran a hospital. Prior to that, we had lived in two other large cities, Chicago and Washington, DC, so I considered myself a city girl for most of my adult life.

Dallas has wonderful amenities shared by other big cities: five-star restaurants, world class museums, theaters, hotels, spas, shopping centers, and its share of parks and green space.

Yet despite its size, Dallas was a nice city in which to raise children and it was surprisingly suburban in our neighborhood, even in the midst of four million or so other inhabitants. Even in the middle of the city, there were some reminders that nature existed, as we saw occasional owls, toads, snakes, and rabbits, and were even issued warnings about coyote sightings.

But Dallas lacked something that I find critical to marking the progression of each year: four true seasons. Though natives may tell you differently, for this Midwesterner, Dallas really only had two seasons: summer and not summer. The summers were hot, dry, dusty, and seemed to go on forever. I used to love summer, then I moved to Dallas.

I never completely acclimated to the weather there. I would tell my children, when the thermometer stalled at the century mark as school started in mid-August, that there was a place where the weather cooled fairly soon after Labor Day, and the fashion rule about not wearing white actually made sense.

The start of football season was another adjustment. We continued to follow college and professional teams on the weekends, and we watched our son play for his school, but it just didn't feel right that anyone, anywhere would be playing football, a cold-weather sport, when the thermometer in Dallas was registering 95 degrees or more.

It often seemed like a mythical place, this land of cooler weather, because fall weather didn't typically come to

Dallas until sometime after Halloween, and typically closer to Thanksgiving.

Don't get me wrong, there were some winter days there that were simply spectacular, with clear blue skies and mild temperatures that made us grateful we weren't shoveling snow or scraping ice off our cars. My son took to wearing shorts almost the entire year, even when it got cold, simply because he could. And the occasional snow days were a treat, because they typically didn't last more than a day.

Then we moved to Winchester and we had to acclimate back to living in a place with four seasons! Fall is gorgeous here and just as I remembered it — chilly by Halloween and most leaves down by Thanksgiving.

Even the first winter here, with its almost-record snowfall, was a delight to my family, and my son, then a high school freshman, became like a little child again, digging snow tunnels and sledding and making snow angels.

We covered up the grill for the winter, something that wasn't necessary in Dallas, and I bought a slow cooker to make stews and roasts and hearty dinners that I hadn't prepared in years. We bought boots and coats and shovels and windshield scrapers.

We became more cold-weather conscious and placed kitty litter bags in each car for traction if needed, bought several emergency road kits, and always kept half a tank of gas or more in each vehicle, just in case. And we have become master snow shovelers, with my husband starting at the bottom of the driveway, and me starting at the top.

After four winters here, I must admit, I've grown a bit less enchanted with the cold, the wind, and the snow. But each change is a reminder to me that there is a rhythm to life that is a soul-stirring feast for someone starved of seasons for almost 15 years.

Spring, with its capricious temperatures and incredible display of new growth and color, reminds me of the fertility and energy of life that simply won't be held back. I walk through my garden beds with impatience in early spring, looking for those first signs of budding life.

Summer is busy with gardening, hiking, kayaking, biking, vacationing, and thankfully, after all that activity, a lot of front-porch sitting. When the thermometer here reaches above 90 and I wilt in the garden, along with the tomatoes, I wonder how I made it through so many summers with more

extreme temperatures.

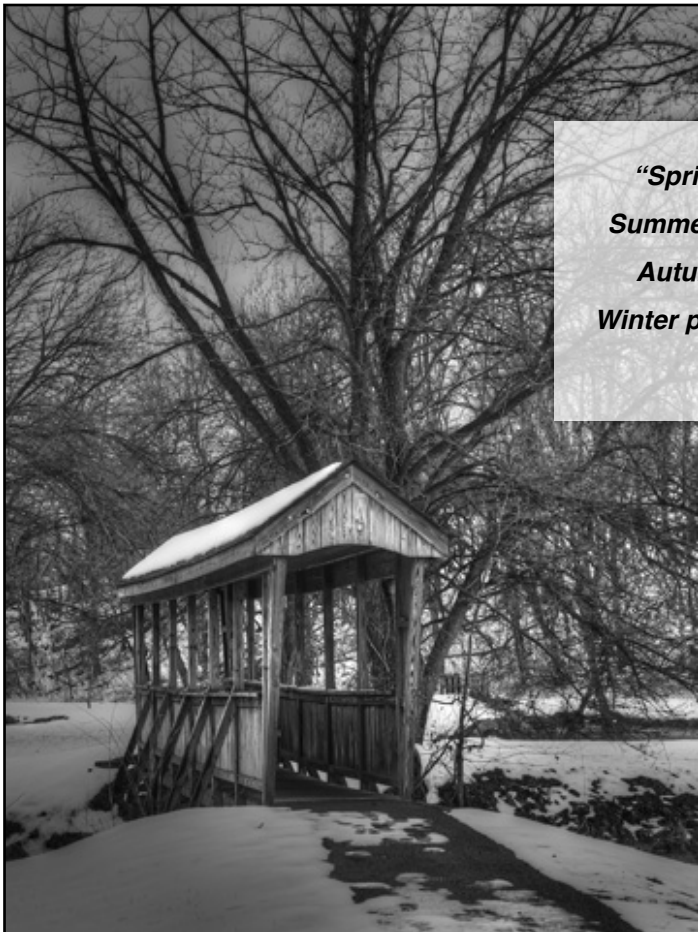
As the light softens and the days shorten, fall is a gentle reminder that it's great to enjoy the crisp, clear weather, eat a few caramel apples, and watch a few football games, but it's also time to rake the leaves, pull in the outdoor furniture, and call the heating company to schedule service.

Winter, with its inky black and cold nights that fall like a curtain too soon each afternoon, serves as a restful, thoughtful period, filled with a pile of books, hot tea, and a few good naps.

I am so appreciative of the twist in fate that brought us to this beautiful valley. Just as I begin to tire of one season, the next one makes its presence known, through subtle changes in sunlight and temperature, or vigorous plant growth, or the cold west winds that increase in volume and ferocity.

I tell people that my feelings for Dallas are like those of a good friendship that I will forever appreciate and cherish. But Winchester and the northern Shenandoah Valley, with its natural beauty and four distinct seasons, is like a never-ending love affair.

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Teri S. Merrill is a freelance writer who moved with her family from Dallas, TX, to Winchester, VA, in the summer of 2009. She writes religion and occasional gardening stories for the Winchester Star, is a master gardener with Virginia Cooperative Extension, and is a board member with the Winchester Education Foundation, dedicated to raising funds for the public schools in the City. She has fallen in love with Winchester and the Shenandoah Valley with its four beautiful seasons, and she is very thankful to have found the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Shenandoah Valley.



***“Spring passes and one remembers one’s innocence.
Summer passes and one remembers one’s exuberance.
Autumn passes and one remembers one’s reverence.
Winter passes and one remembers one’s perseverance.”
- Yoko Ono***

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Thom Potts has been taking pictures ever since he received his childhood Kodak Instamatic, but his interest in photography developed into a passion with the arrival of the digital era. A graduate of the University of Virginia, he works at Clarke County High School as Coordinator of Advanced Programs and teacher of French. In addition to photography, his interests include biking and travel, all three of which he often combines in pursuit of the perfect photograph.

Winter Bridge
Thom Potts
B&W photograph

IN THE KITCHEN*Bob Lesman*

Making coffee yesterday morning
I found a big-eyed mouse

in the sink beside bits of cat food
rinsed from blind Jake's bowl.

This chill morning there are two.
Tomorrow unless word gets around

their bleak corridors that the cuisine,
though exquisite, is risky

maybe there'll be three. As I run
water in one corner the pair huddle

in another like innocents
at the fists of the tyrant. Later

flexed by coffee I extract them
one by one in a method I recommend:

drop a clear plastic cup over him,
slip the lid underneath, then

out the door to the dormant
flower bed and release with a toss.

Amid beasts of prey in frigid weather
I confess it's a precarious freedom

to enjoy--stunned, ambivalent,
flung to chance.

GRIZZLY BEAR*Bob Lesman*

In a pine stand at the pasture's edge
a family's winter ritual.

To Uncle Charles the Blue Ridge
in waning light is a grizzly bear's
back for all its grey wildness.

As he says it, beyond the vineyard
the Alaskan bear romps across
Virginia, leaving its color for our eyes.

His hand returning from its sweep
draws us into another loveliness.
We are touched by it as a grey patina
the air leaves on our faces, on our hair.

We stand, each of us, in our rightful age.
In red caps our young ones cut the chosen tree.

BEAR CHURCH ROCK*Bob Lesman*

Early from cities even the coldest days
hikers rise in high hills
on trails by falling streams and fallen
trees that stay put, rise through
meadows and cornfields the hill people made,
fields they abandoned to rock piles
gone to oak and poplar, grape vines
now salacious festoons on traces of cabin,
church and gravestone, climb to a hemlock stand
like a rustling curtain parted to
Bear Church Rock above the valley. They sit
in twos and threes in the sharp air
and speak their fresh amazement.

BURYING THE CAT - For Chad*Bob Lesman*

Before Thanksgiving dinner a walk
 through the back field led to sycamores
 like white horses rearing up, a walk
 along the creek sweet with cress,
 up through the old Christmas tree lot
 now a small forest where the deer hide,
 and on beside the neighbor's new oak fence
 to keep the horses safe.

Near the fox's hole in the clearing,
 there, the cat missing three days
 appeared to the oldest child.
 He said to his mother, Oh God, you
 don't want to look over here.

Made of different flesh now, I thought,
 as I turned her, found no wounds. No cause
 lurked, no malevolence slunk nearby
 in tall weeds. Whatever it was
 scattered us across the clearing's vacancy.

My wife for relief turned to cookery.
 Our adolescent shrugged toward a car.
 Grandmother, trying to say the right thing,
 merely said the true, called it a damper
 on the joy she'd traveled far to share.

Then I to show the eldest son the way
 took the shovel, took the stiff cat
 by the hind feet and put her in the hole
 I dug without a word.

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Bob Lesman was raised Catholic in the Indianapolis suburbs. He became a UU in the 1970s and a member of UUCSV in 1993. He retired in 2008 after a long career as a community-college English professor. He and his wife Ann live in the wilds of Clarke County near Millwood.

Believe it or not, even as you read this first issue of our new quarterly publication, it's time to start thinking about the next one! The spring issue, scheduled to appear in March 2014, will be the first to bear the new name that the UUCSV community will choose, so its theme will be "Names" in celebration of its new identity.

As always, we are looking for all kinds of creative endeavors for our spring issue: essays, fiction, poetry, photography, other visual art, or anything else that you want to share with us. Your submissions may relate to our theme of "Names" – but they don't have to – so feel free to send us anything you'd like to contribute. We would love to see more from the writers, artists, and photographers whose work makes up this inaugural issue, but we're also eager to publish submissions from members of the UUCSV community who haven't yet made their creative talents known.

Submissions may be made electronically, preferably as Microsoft Word documents or JPEG files, to Thom Potts at thompotts@gmail.com no later than Friday, February 7, 2014. If this method of getting us your contribution isn't convenient, please see Thom Potts, Libby Kronthal, or John Elrick at a Sunday service so that we can make arrangements to get a hard copy from you.

Help us continue to be a creative, thought-provoking voice of the UUCSV community – send us your submissions, please!