

# A Recipe Is Not Sacrosanct

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## **A recipe is not sacrosanct and a computer program is not always right**

Like many young children, I did not like raw onions. Remember, this was before the idea of even the milder Vidalia or sweet onion. On the other hand, my mother and grandmother loved raw onions. But, to get me to eat green beans made with a generations-old recipe, my mom removed the sting from the onions by soaking them in very hot water for an hour before putting them in the dish. As a result of that change to the recipe, it became my favorite vegetable dish and is revered by her grandsons.

Moving forward to the 1980's, Bob and I took jobs that involved working with computers. We often related stories of our experiences while sharing a meal at my mother's dinner table. She listened and absorbed just enough to challenge her bank when the bank statement did not match her meticulous bookkeeping. After all, she had been a professional bookkeeper most of her adult life. When the teller tried to defend the accuracy of the banking system, my mother challenged with the truism, 'Garbage in' garbage out.' Needless to say, the bank corrected their error.

## **Classy clothes do not include a lot of buttons and bows.**

Even in the times of making-do, my mother was a keen observer of design for the home, her clothes and mine, and gardening. This probably started because she was the daughter of a very successful builder back in Pittsburg before the Depression. Whatever the source, she was keen on clean design – which was one quality of her definition of beauty. And, when she made an item of clothing, the inside of the garment looked almost as good as the outside. I was never uncomfortable wearing something she made.- and she made almost all our clothes until I began to sew and make my own. Her efforts were not from an obsessive motivation, it came from honoring the cost of the materials and the human hours represented in the garment, plus a joy in the creative process and result. That attention to detail comes back to me when I cut corners when making anything these days. I begin to question my recognition of the network of life that is represented in the moment. With my work with UU Ministry for Earth, the recognition of the use of resources and of the caring for all life only heightens the spiritual quality of creating anything.

## **You do not need a degree to learn a new skill or be a leader.**

Ah, the power of observation and study. My mother had to drop out of school in the ninth grade as the Depression hit. My dad only went through the third grade. Both were avid readers and keen observers and would tackle most anything that needed to be done. Remember, as young adults, they were caring for 3 siblings and my grandmother. I remember clearly the day my dad reminded me that 'If you can read, you can learn anything.' In fact, when my mom decided it was time for me to learn to sew, she handed me the fabric, the pattern, a Simplicity sewing instruction book, and use of her tools. I guess because she showed little doubt in my ability to learn, I jumped right in and made the very simple dress in two days and wore it to a party the second day.

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When I was in elementary school, my mom and dad were involved in multiple leadership positions in our very small town. When I commented on that in later years, my mom just brushed the compliment off by saying, 'In a small town, everyone has to take a turn keeping it going.' I observed, however, that they were often doing the organizing, the convening, the cajoling necessary to help build the services for the community. One or the other of them served on the cemetery board, the committees to build community pools and the small civic center, the emergency preparedness team, the police governing board, the church volunteer groups and the city council. No one told them they could not lead because they did not have degrees or even high school diplomas. That may have been because a lot of folks their age were similarly deprived of formal education, however, those folks were not stepping up as often.

## **Caring for one another is not a luxury.**

Ann Jarvis had been a peace activist who cared for wounded soldiers on both sides of the American Civil War, and created Mother's Day Work Clubs to address public health issues. Anna Jarvis wanted to honor her mother by continuing the work she started and in 1908 set aside a day to honor all mothers. By 1914, Mother's Day became a national holiday unique to the United States. However, Anna Jarvis never approved of the commercialization of the day; her intention was to honor caring for one another and peace – her mother's motivations for community service.

In my mother's time, she lived through the Depression, hurricanes in south Florida, and World War II. Both of my parents had fathers who were hard-hit by the Depression, lost hope and died young from alcoholism. My mother and father took care of family left adrift all of the way through the 1950's. It was hard work and a life of 'making do.' My mother was fond of saying that 'Those were NOT the good old days.'

## **Community involvement is not about prestige.**

As I mentioned before, my parents were doers. I never heard them pull rank. We were not among the wealthy in our community. Many of the farmers and bankers lived a much more extravagant lifestyle. But, investment in sustaining the community was not in question. They lived a better definition of democracy than I was getting in civics class. Now, I don't mean to imply that my parents waxed poetic and glowingly about the work. I do remember my dad shaving with an electric shaver as he prepared for an evening meeting – all the while using rather 'blue' language when describing some of the other folks who would be at the meeting – much of it muffled by the sound of the razor.

## **It is not necessary to be grim about community contributions.**

No one loved to plan a party more than my mom. Even in the depths of the shortages during World War II, she, her sister, and her mother would organize theme nights for food and music with friends. My dad would play fiddle and guitar and the guys from the machine shop played the piano and other instruments to make 'a joyful noise.' When, in the 1950's, my parents built a small home, the living room was designed to hold 2 square dance sets. Potluck, a pick-up band, and a porch for cooling off on a south Florida evening - those and other festive times served to celebrate the ties in the community.

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## **Learning acceptable or effective behaviors does not need to be a grim experience.**

To the contrary, new behaviors can be empowering. The message that organizing was heavy yoke was not communicated to me. In fact, my mom once commented in later years that folks who have something to work on or for are the lucky ones. Neither of my parents gossiped in negative ways about others. They seemed, though life's lessons, to be in a place of seeing value in folks, even when they disagreed. In fact, after their divorce when I was 10 years old, they never spoke ill of each other in my presence. That, I count as a blessing because I was never put in an uncomfortable middle position. Some might say that they just held all the negative feelings inside. I did not get that impression, I saw them grieve and they talked about it a bit with me; I just saw folks who got on with life, sometimes with a tired body and face, but got through that to a better place later.

## **It is not unhealthy to grieve and it is not disrespectful to do what needs to be done to go on living.**

My mom missed her dad a lot, even though he took a turn towards destructive behavior in later life. A picture of him in better days was in a prominent place in our living room. But, she was the one who took care of his burial and regrouping of the family when she was but 16 years old.

My mom was an ambulance driver in World War II, ferrying wounded from the air base in West Palm Beach to the new army hospital in our town one hour away. She saw a lot of messed up soldiers, even though she was a long way away from the frontlines. But, everyone had to do their part.

My dad was killed in a hunting accident when I was 19 years old; my mom was the one who modelled how much physical activity can help. My bedroom was never as clean before or after that event.

The list goes on, but you get the point of her lesson: hurting and crying is okay and so is – as Garrison Keillor used to say of folks in Lake Wobegone – ‘Doing what needs to be done’ is not disrespectful and can in fact, be part of the move forward.

## **Does an agnostic and a Catholic equal a Unitarian Universalist?**

As Andy LePage shared with us last week, events and conversations in our youth help shape our actions or inactions later in life. Do you think my development was influenced by a Catholic mother who did not go to church after her divorce, but insisted I attend every week with my grandmother, and an agnostic dad who visited once per year, gave \$50 and slept through the service? Were their examples of living every day the more powerful influence on my choices and values later in life?

I shared stories today that illustrate how my parents led by deeds and realized that maybe they ‘set me up’ to be ready to affirm the Unitarian Universalist principles and democratic way of being together. Though I am challenged with living the principles to the fullest, the first and seventh are really influential in my life: The inherent worth and dignity of all beings and respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Add to those the values like compassion and peace and democracy and spiritual growth. Hmmmm. I think I will give them credit for a pretty good foundation. I am grateful and humbled.

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## **Questions:**

1 – If your parents or someone you know lived through times of hardship like the Depression or WWII, what models did they provide for this time of pandemic or other times of stress in your life?

2 – What lessons did you observe from your parents that you worked to pass on to someone else – child, co-worker, friend?

3 – What lessons from your parents do you think are manifested in the way you face a situation of not knowing a ready and effective solution?

4 – Do you have times when you think, ‘Wait, did I just do something that felt like I am re-enacting my parents style/method/reaction?’

Reference from UUA.org

## **Unitarian Universalism's Seven Principles**

Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote seven Principles, which we hold as strong values and moral guides. We live out these Principles within a “living tradition” of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from sources as diverse as science, poetry, scripture, and personal experience.

As Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove explains, “The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities.”

1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.