

This I Believe

Good morning! I'm Jon Reuman, and I've been invited to share my spiritual journey with you, including influences and events that shaped who I am today. Because I fall mainly in the doubter, skeptic, and science-over-faith camp, declaring a religious belief goes a bit against my nature. So, instead, I'll hedge a bit, and offer three Reuman Ruminations.

First, some personal background

- I feel fortunate to have deep religious roots under my family tree. One grandfather, Reverend Alfred Swan, was a Congregational minister. He was a force for social action in Madison, Wisconsin. My other grandfather, Reverend Otto Reuman, was also a Congregational minister, and was a missionary in China. They knew the Bible, chapter and verse, and they were passionate people. When you asked them for their beliefs, you'd better be ready for a sermon, quite literally.
- Connected to those roots is a tree trunk, my parents. My father was a Philosophy professor, and my mother was a Music professor, both at Colby in Maine. That makes me a Faculty Brat. Dad was a Conscientious Objector during WWII and performed Alternative Service by fighting forest fires and working in a psychiatric hospital. Then, when the US started the first peace-time draft in 1948, he openly broke the law by refusing to register. He finished his PhD just in time to enter Danbury State Prison. He served 5 months. While in prison, he proposed to my mother. She's a smart cookie, even a Phi Beta Kappa college grad, but somehow, she decided it was wise to say yes to this felon. Together, they served with the Friends Ambulance Unit in China in the late 1940's, then served with the American Friends Service Committee in Freiburg, Germany, in the early 1950's, and later with the Quakers in Berlin, Germany, in the mid 1960's. They are/were thoughtful and caring people, and less inclined toward conventional religion than their parents. When you asked them for their beliefs, you might get a professorial lecture and gentle encouragement to serve others.
- Connected to that tree trunk are very important branches. These influences also shape who I am today and include: close relationships with 3 sisters and 1 brother; Carolyn Lamb, my wife and best friend of 30 years; and our 2 extraordinary daughters. When you ask Monica and Audrey for their beliefs, you'll hear clear, heart-felt convictions, though now likely arriving via phone text or on Instagram.

- And finally, there are important branches on nearby trees that shape my views. I became fast friends with a group of 5 men right out of college. We were in each other's weddings, raised our kids together in Boston, and traveled as a group with our families to Peru and Mexico. There's also my Men's Group at FUUSN, all listening to and supporting each other for decades.

And so here is **Reuman Ruminations #1**. I'm attached to and get spiritual sustenance from this wonderful tree. I feel fortunate and very grateful. As I get older, I've come to understand that the spiritual tree I've described is truly rare. It's daunting to figure out how best to pay it forward.

And now, a few snapshots from my spiritual journey

- My parents wanted their 5 children to be exposed to religious basics, so they enrolled us in RE at the UU church in Waterville, Maine. Mostly, I remember fudging my answers to RE homework, fidgeting in the pews, drinking lots of warm bullion soup after services, and sometimes stopping for ice cream at Rummel's on the way home. In hindsight, the best part was being in the caring embrace of all members of a small congregation in a small town.
- Things got interesting when we moved to West Berlin, Germany, and lived there from 1964 to 1966. I attended an all-German grade school and loved it. My father was working as a Quaker ambassador between leaders in the East and West soon after the Berlin Wall went up in 1961. I'll never forget passing through Checkpoint Charlie on our way to hour-long silent Quaker meetings in East Berlin. Barbed wire and guards with machine guns helped make those trips memorable. I found it challenging to sit still for 10 minutes, much less an hour. The Quakers want everyone to plumb their own deep thoughts and share spiritual insights. That was beyond me then, and it's still a stretch. I appreciate a minister who's a pro!
- When back in the US, my parents sent me to a UU Liberal Religious Youth conference at Eisenhower College. I was 13. Imagine my horror when I went to my dorm room and found out that my roommate was a 13-year-old girl! Now, imagine her horror! I can't remember any cultivation of my religious self, but the adult leaders did give 30 boys and 30 girls a group class in the fine art of body-oil massage. It was the 60's, man.

- Fast forward to my freshman year in college. I made friends with a couple classmates who were Born-Again Christians. I took a part in a theatre production called The Singer, an allegory about the life of Jesus. I was looking for a type of religious connection that involved more certainty, commitment and scripture. I briefly attended a Baptist Calvary Temple. It all lasted about 6 months. I balked when it came time to accept Christ into my life, and I couldn't get comfortable when people started speaking in tongues.
- I moved to Boston after college, wanted to find people with whom I shared values, and attended the UU First & Second Church in Boston. I wanted to meet single UU women my age. Although I didn't meet Carolyn there, we were married there. Grandfather Rev Swan closed the wedding service with his arms held high overhead, booming out: "Marriage is Twice the Joys and Half the Sorrows!". He was married for 70 years, and he should know.

And so, we come to **Reuman Ruminations #2**. Goldilocks had it right. If you find yourself on one spiritual path but wonder about other paths, check them out. Taste them, sit on them, even nap on them. Maybe you'll like them better, or maybe you'll go back to where you started and find you were in the right place to begin with.

That brings me to FUUSN

- Carolyn and I came to FUUSN in 1991 when Gerry Krick was minister. I was taken aback by the people I met. These people were so caring toward each other, curious and smart, and oriented toward social action. Given my years with UU's, coming here was like slipping into a familiar, comfortable and supportive armchair. I've been nourished and centered by the wisdom of Gerry's, James' and Erin's worship services.
- Over the years, I've been involved in many aspects of FUUSN life, each tied to stages in my life. I started in RE in the infant room. I was an RE teacher with Norm Thibeault and Jeff Baker, using a Jesus action figure to hold kid's attention. I was a COA mentor to James Golin, a member of the Personnel Policy Committee with Bruce Holbein and Dot Jacobson, on the Board of Trustees when waters got rough a couple years ago, and on a Mass Bay District team helping UU congregations become fair paying.

- I'll share three highlights. One is Sandy Island. We took our baby girls there and continued to for 15 years. Somehow, we enjoyed shivering in the cabins and wading through spring mud. We fell in love with the community that put together touching talent shows, took collective responsibility (and no responsibility) as kids wandered the island, and gathered for more intimate worship services facing the lake and under a tree canopy.
- Another enduring highlight is belonging to a Men's Group at FUUSN. I was pulled in when I lost one of my best friends to cancer in 2005 and wanted some help to make sense of it. It's been a terrific source of support, has helped me to grow as a listener, and I'd wish the same for other men. Believe it or not, we don't talk about sports.
- One newer highlight is the Multicultural Ministry Initiative. For the last few years, I've been growing in my understanding of the many forms of unearned privilege that I've benefited from throughout my life as a white, educated, straight male with many systemic socioeconomic advantages. It's been eye-opening, and I have a long, long way to go. And, in my view, FUUSN has a way to go, too. I'm so appreciative that the social action currents at FUUSN swept me up in this area for inward growth and outward action.

And now, we come to the last, **Reuman Ruminations #3**. For me, FUUSN is a community of spiritual nourishment. It's a port in a storm these days. I don't have anything comparable in my life. Even so, we have our flaws and many growth opportunities. We risk living in a bubble, in an echo-chamber of like-minded people, if we can't find ways to actively bring in more diverse perspectives. I look forward to this as part of my continuing spiritual journey.

I'll close with a few words from the mystic poet, Rumi, the original Rumi-nator: "As you start to walk on the way, the way appears"

Thank you.

Jon Reuman

March 11, 2018