

This I believe

May 30th, 2010

I grew up in a small rural town outside of Boston; the son of an Episcopal minister father and an dedicated and active homemaker mother, the second of 4 children, oldest son. Living in a small Massachusetts community with siblings I loved and enjoyed allowed me several life shaping experiences. One was that I was a part of a church community. Notice I did not say religious or Christian community because, in retrospect, despite learning to look like a good Christian, I was learning a different lesson. What meant the most to me was that I was a part of a community. I knew the people in my church, liked most of them, and felt a sense of belonging. We shared both times of joy and times of sorrow.

Another experience was that the area I lived in was steeped in American history, a revolutionary spirit that was the foundation of our country and national identity. As a child/adolescent, I felt I was a part of this history, like I was an extension of the work of Paul Revere, John Adams, Sam Adams, and John Hancock.

Probably the most important experience was being a part of a family that was active in the community. My father was well known for being a religious leader, active in the Democratic party and local government, and a social activist. It is through my father's activism I was drawn into social justice work. My mom was the rock behind the activist. Not one who attracted the same kind of attention, she was the soul of our family, the one who allowed the rest of us rise and fly. She got me to church, school, baseball practice, and choir. My older sister was flamboyant, and passionate, my younger sister was quiet and steady, my brother found his passion reflected in the Charles Schultz comic strip, "Peanuts" and was always looking outward, for the next place to go. All activists in their own way.

I had a great childhood, protected from much hardship, allowed to play baseball, hockey, football and basketball with the 15-20 kids who could easily be rallied with a couple of phone calls. As a teen I was allowed, actually encouraged, to embrace the spirit of those very challenging years in our countries history, the 1960's and early 70's. I had lots of friends, was encouraged be social, took part in civil rights rallies, antiwar demonstrations, grew my hair long, wore bell bottoms and floppy hats, and listened to rock and roll music.

I went to Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York, before the age of Ronald Regan when it was OK to pursue a course of study for the sake of being an educated

person, not just to become marketable. I loved being a part of a small college community. I majored in Sociology, minored in American Indian Religion, I lived in a cooperative house, was a resident advisor, was involved in the newspaper, radio station, washed dishes at a women's cooperative, and played rugby. After college I stayed in that same small upstate NY town. I had friends who loved to swim naked in the lakes in New York State and I spent lots of time sans clothing in a sauna we built on the shore of Seneca Lake. Bicycles were our mode of transportation and recreation. We commuted on bicycles and spent many weekends on long rides, our favorite being a 90 mile ride around Seneca Lake several miles of which was through a deserted army depot. We used to ride through the depot naked. Just picture a group of 25-30 naked college age kids, riding bikes through an army depot along Seneca Lake. Actually, I still have the pictures. My first job out of college served my immediate need to buy beer and pay rent. I worked in an electronics factory as a receiving clerk. Not the kind of job most of my college mates were doing, and I never liked the job, but loved the people working there. They were mostly late teens and early 20's, mostly women working on production lines. On Fridays after work we would get kegs of beer and hang out at the lake, drinking, talking, flirting. I was a college graduate among townies. Not the role most of my college faculty expected me to play, but in this group I found some of the most, honest, accepting, and fun people I have ever known. They allowed me to be a part of their town, their community, their social scene.

I met Jenny. We lived this life together in this town for three years, working, playing, and communing with another wonderful group of friends. To pursue professional goals we moved to Oakland, California, where Jenny went to Berkeley. We had this incredible group of friends there, mostly grad students at Berkeley and their spouses/partners, among whom were John and Anne Stark who live in Paradise and continue to be part of our family away from family. We camped in the winter and summer, hiked all over northern California, built snow caves, swam in mountain lakes, spent many hours sharing food and the joys and challenges of living the transient life of grad school. We had 7 great years there.

Jenny and I moved to Michigan, lived there for 1 ½ years. I never liked that much. We made a few friends but I never felt connected. Outside of Rachel being born there and great experience Jenny had in her post doc, it wasn't much fun.

In 1993, we moved to Logan. I wasn't able to make good on my promise to stay home with Rachel for 6 months, so we had to find day care. We found this great woman to tend

Rachel, Beverly, who became Rachel's third parent. Rachel stayed with her until 1st grade, as did Dylan. That day care became to source for a wonderful social group which, at one point included 12 kids from 10 couples with 20 different last names. Over 17 years of dinners, birthday parties, watching our kids grow and we remain strongly connected to many of these people, some of whom are a part of this congregation. Jenny and I joined this church in 1994, several months after the first meetings on the second floor of "A Book Store" which is now Citrus and Sage. This small group of idealists has grown in ways we never imagined.

My children are of this community. They are Utahns, westerners, mountain people and maybe even Unitarian Universalists.

What I have learned from this is what I believe. I believe in community. Just saying I believe in community, though, is like saying I love people. It is a nice thing to know but it doesn't really explain much about what I believe is truly important. So I owe you more of an explanation.

I believe that community is an amazing social phenomenon. Like electricity, it is profoundly lawful. Yet there remains something about it that is inherently mysterious, miraculous, incomprehensible. There is no single definition of community. Community is something more than the sum of its parts and its individual members. But it is this "something more" that gives community its heart and soul. In many ways it is an abstract concept, almost mystical. Using words and language to explain this almost mystical idea, are often inadequate. Yet my task today is to use words to explain why I believe in community.

This I believe...

I believe in the support from people I know and trust, people with whom I share beliefs about the way the world should be.

I believe in being a part of a physical, emotional, spiritual, or experiential community that respects my motives, supports my growth, and values my intention and service.

I believe that a community that is worthy of my commitment must value my emotional safety, must allow me to be vulnerable and must be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of others.

I believe in that the foundational principles in building community rely on having empathy and a strong sense that we will all must succeed if any of us to succeed.

I believe that community is more than a safe and supportive home. It is a world of people who are not afraid to be the voice for those who have no voice.

So here is the core.

I believe that the ideal life is a life of service, but not the life of just doing service. Service without a tangible goal of showing others how to also be of service is only a little more valuable than making money for the sake of making money. The goal of service must be to give others a model to emulate, and the tools to, not only teach others, but to empower them with the knowledge, passion, and an understanding of their responsibility in building a strong and functional community.

Truly my heroes are servants of this stripe. These are people dedicated to empowerment, to teaching lessons of responsibility and service with the understanding that through these efforts, community becomes a powerful, unstoppable, and empowered movement. To this end I believe in Mahatma Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Paul Revere, Abraham Lincoln, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlin, Bono, Bruce Springsteen, John Lennon, Mother Teresa, Albert Einstein, Florence Nightingale, most mothers including mine, Gladys Bubnowicz, George Washington, Roger Wootton, Jimmy and Roseline Carter, Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy, Kristin Olsen, Marshall Thompson, and Herm Olsen, to mention only a few of the many. These people know, or knew, they have a purpose, but understand they are a small part of a global community to which they are dedicated.

I look for opportunities to build community everywhere. I have found it at the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State, at Bear River Mental Health, in my immediate and extended family, in my associations with Peaceworks, in some of the most unlikely places like Haiti, and right here in this room. I find that once people get this, their lives are rarely more simple but never less rewarding. Once, when I asked my friend Dennis Odell how he had time to be a dedicated pediatrician, to do research in finding the cause for Autism, to be a Bishop in a student ward for the LDS Church, to be a father, husband, to be my mentor and a mentor for others. He said, "It would be harder to not do all these things."

This leads me to my last point. Unlike what common wisdom suggests, I believe that dedicating myself to this kind of service needs no acknowledgment. As much as being seen as the ultimate altruist can seem attractive, I am not that person, and do not value altruism as a goal.

The closest I can come this is in being an optimist. I do not believe that being acknowledged for my service has much value to me or to the service. What I do believe is that being able to do social justice work is its greatest reward and what makes me feel joy. I feel the best, not when someone tells me what good I have done, but when they say, "I get it."

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