

The Tolling of the Bells

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Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley
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*Je m'en vais chercher un grand peut-être;
tirez le rideau, la farce est jouée.
I am off in search of the great may-be.
Draw the curtain, the farce is played.*
— last words of François Rabelais, 1553

Call to Worship

It's the very end of the year, the very last day. Soon there will be fireworks and parades, football games, and then the inevitable task of resuming what passes for "normal life" after the bustle of the winter holiday season. Today is a poignant day, as filled with memories as it is with anticipation. We can't help but recall moments of the past year that stood out for us — perhaps a vacation trip, a move, a marriage, a new baby born into the family.

Memories of the past year, of course, are not always pleasant. We have endured divorces and the end of relationships, illness, surgeries, job losses, and of course, the personal failure to live up to our own expectations. That's the way life works.

Yet life also always gives us the opportunity to start again. Naturally, we can start again on any day of the week, any month of the year. But the beginning of a new calendar year invites us to make resolutions, sometimes, or perhaps at least to form ideas of what we'd like to accomplish in the coming year. Though our

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resolutions may be kept or broken, and though our plans may go awry or become great successes, there are some constants we know we can rely on as we move forward with our lives in 2007.

Our families and our friends will give us shelter, advice, joy, and the occasional talking-to; our beloved community here at UUCV will continue to provide an atmosphere of caring support and spiritual kinship. We will meet new people, make new discoveries, and have experiences that we didn't expect.

This morning as a congregation, to acknowledge the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new, we will honor some of the people, whether known to us personally or known to the world, who died in 2006, and we will look forward to the possibilities that the new year opens to us all.

Come, let us worship together.

Eulogies for Public Figures Introduction

Selecting just six public figures and limiting our remarks to 300 words each is a tough discipline. We chose only Americans, but we noted that an American dies every 11 seconds. The obituaries remind us that everyone is unique, makes a particular mark on his or her family, friends, and community, and sometimes even on the world.

We chose to comment on the lives of those who made a significant impact on our culture through a lifetime of contributions, but we didn't select the most well-known celebrities.

Thus we didn't include President Ford, James Brown, Ken Lay, or Ed Bradley. Nor did we include any of the several dictators who died this year — Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, and Augusto Pinochet among them.

We passed over Moose and Harriet. Moose was a veteran canine actor — the Jack Russell who played Eddie Crane on *Frasier*. Harriet, at 175, was the second longest-lived documented tortoise. Charles Dawin was claimed to have owned her. Another tortoise, Adwaita, was claimed to have been 250 years old, but his birth is undocumented. Carbon-dating of his shell is planned to verify his age. It is an interesting race with no hare in competition, their having been long ago left in the dust so to speak.

We left out the athletes, including Ann Calvello whose nose was broken 12 times in seven decades in roller derby; Fausto Vitello who popularized street skateboarding; and Shane Drury the bull rider who died of a rare cancer at 27.

We didn't include several oldest persons: Elizabeth Bolden, at 116 the oldest authenticated person in the world and the last known to have been alive in the 1880s; Moses Hardy at 113 the oldest man in the US and the last African-American veteran of World War I; or Si Simmons, who at 101 was the longest-lived professional baseball player in history.

But we must toll the bell for the war dead. The total US casualty count in Iraq was 2998 as of yesterday. So far this year there have been 818 deaths to US troops, including men and women from central Pennsylvania. The deaths of Iraqis from the civil war of sectarian violence, political assassinations, and military action remain uncounted but are many times that number.

Betty Friedan
February 4, 1921 — February 4, 2006

Betty Goldstein, high school class valedictorian and *summa cum laude* graduate of Smith College, described herself as having been "the girl with all the A's who wanted boys worse than anything." That is, until she discovered that really wasn't what she wanted, after marrying Carl Friedan and producing three children.

A 15th reunion questionnaire that Betty Friedan circulated among her Smith College classmates revealed that many of them were as dissatisfied as she with the pervasive cultural values that urged them to find their fulfillment and identity vicariously, through their husbands and children. This and other studies she conducted eventually led to the 1963 publication of her book *The Feminine Mystique*, which is now regarded as one of the most influential American books of the 20th century, laying the groundwork for the modern feminist movement.

Described as "a player in a world that she wanted to make better," Friedan was a tireless organizer and political activist, yet she insisted that the women's movement had to remain in the American mainstream, that men could be allies, and that the family should not be rejected.

She was not necessarily beloved, as she was known for riding rough-shod over co-workers and colleagues in her zeal to get things done. A founder of the National Organization for Women and the National Women's Political Caucus, she later parted company with these organizations, focusing her work later in life on how society treats its elderly "with the same patronizing, 'compassionate' denial of their personhood that was heard when people spoke about women 30 years earlier."

Friedan insisted that every woman should be able to ask "Who am I, and what do I want out of life?" She mustn't feel selfish and neurotic if she wants goals of her own, outside of husband and children. We can thank her for the fact that those questions no longer sound revolutionary.

I toll the bell for Betty Friedan, feminist and activist, February 4, 1921 to February 4, 2006.

James DeAnda
August 28, 1925 — September 7, 2006

James DeAnda, though a modest and unassuming man, played a major role as an attorney and Federal judge in extending civil rights to Latinos. He was born in Houston in 1925 to Mexican immigrant parents. After serving in the Marines, he graduated from Texas A&M in 1948. Two years later he completed a law degree at the University of Texas and passed the bar. But as a Latino, it took another year to find employment — at \$25 a week.

In 1954 he had a lead role in the appeal of a murder conviction of a Latino in Jackson County on the basis of the county's failure to permit Mexican Americans to serve on juries. In 25 years no one with a Spanish surname had been called for jury duty in the county. The US Supreme Court ruled unanimously in overturning the conviction.

DeAnda argued landmark cases dealing with discrimination in Texas schools. He successfully challenged a policy that kept Mexican-American children in a separate track, spending three years in first grade allegedly to learn English.

In 1968 he co-founded the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and in 1970 founded the Texas Rural Legal Assistance Organization to provide legal services to migrant workers.

Jimmy Carter appointed him to the Federal bench in 1979 and he retired as chief judge of the Southern District of Texas in 1992.

He once told a group of law students, "You will find law to be a most satisfying career because of the service you can give your fellow man. I know of no other endeavor in which you can bring about healthy change and make a decent living."

He died of prostate cancer at his Michigan summer home.

I toll the bell for James DeAnda, civil rights attorney and Federal judge, August 28, 1925 to September 7, 2006.

Daniel Pinkham
June 5, 1923 — December 18, 2006

Although he wasn't a Unitarian Universalist, Daniel Pinkham was the Director of Music at King's Chapel in Boston for more than four decades. As an organist, it was fitting that his primary professional relationship was with the first church in the United States to have a pipe organ.

During his prolific musical career, his output included organ works, orchestral works, chamber music, works for piano, harpsichord and other solo instruments, theatrical works, soundtracks for television films, and especially choral pieces. His "Christmas Cantata" has entered the repertoire of many church choirs and student ensembles around the country, and was undoubtedly performed in hundreds of venues in the last few weeks.

Daniel Pinkham's grandmother was Lydia E. Pinkham, who gained fame for her Vegetable Compound patent medicine, a solution of herbs, roots and 18 percent alcohol aimed at curing "female complaints." Pinkham enjoyed telling the story of Mae West, who after drinking her first bottle said, "I feel like a new man."

As a student at Philips Academy, Andover, he was deeply influenced by a concert given in 1939 by the Trapp Family singers, recently escaped from Austria. "Here, suddenly, I was hearing clarity, simplicity, thin textures," he said in a 1981 interview. "It shaped my whole outlook."

Indeed, Pinkham was beloved by church musicians all over the country for the simplicity and accessibility of his musical compositions. He said of his own music, "One of the most impor-

tant influences on my music has been my contact with performers, and I am most happy when writing for a specific performance. This, I suppose, explains why I have no unperformed music."

The minister of King's Chapel, the Rev. Earl Holt, pointed out on Mr. Pinkham's death earlier this month that one of his lines, from "Uncommon Prayers," read, "And, at our journey's end, grant, O God, a gentle landing."

I toll the bell for Daniel Pinkham, musician and composer, June 5, 1923 to December 18, 2006.

Octavia Estelle Butler, Jr.
June 22, 1947 — February 24, 2006

While she was watching "Devil Girl from Mars," a particularly bad science fiction movie, Octavia Estelle Butler, Jr. decided she could write a better story, turned off the TV, and took up pen and paper. She was 12 at the time.

Butler was born in 1947 in Pasadena, California. Her father, a shoeshiner, died when she was a child. Her mother cleaned houses to support the family. As a shy only child, a daydreamer, dyslexic, a particularly tall woman, African-American, lesbian, and science fiction writer, she was keenly aware of social injustice which was the theme of most of her work.

After publication of her first short-story in 1971, she thought she was well on her way, but there were five more years of rejection slips before *Patternmaster* was published in 1976.

Her most popular work, *Kindred* sold a quarter million copies and was reprinted in a 25th anniversary edition by Beacon Press. She described it as a "grim fantasy" that shows what it is like "to have all of society arrayed against you." In *The Parable of the Sower*, she describes liberation theology as her character moves away from her father's Baptist leanings in the face of struggle.

She published several other novels and short stories and was granted a lifetime achievement award in writing by the PEN American Center. She was also the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant and other awards.

In 1999 she moved to Seattle, where she died outside her home from a fall on February 24th this year.

She described herself as “comfortably asocial — a hermit in the middle of Seattle- — a pessimist if I’m not careful, a feminist, a Black, a former Baptist, an oil-and-water combination of ambition, laziness, insecurity, certainty, and drive.”

I toll the bell for Octavia Estelle Butler, Jr., science fiction writer committed to social justice, June 22, 1947 to February 24, 2006.

Jane Hodgson
January 23, 1915 — October 23, 2006

Overcoming the patriarchal obstacles that lay before any woman physician in the 1930’s and 40’s, Jane Hodgson opened a private practice in Minnesota’s Twin Cities as a Board-certified obstetrician-gynecologist. A number of concerns — endless requests by her patients, the horrifying medical results of botched abortions, the hypocrisy of her physician colleagues, the imbalance of options available to poor women and well-off ones — all converged in her decision to perform an illegal abortion in 1970, at the age of 55, as a test case to Minnesota law, making her the only physician in the U.S. to be convicted for performing an abortion.

Within days after the procedure, Dr. Hodgson was arrested and taken from her office in handcuffs. Her initial conviction could have taken her to jail for five years, but she appealed the case to the Minnesota Supreme Court, where it languished until the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 invalidated the Minnesota law.

During the years while her case was undecided, she served as the medical director of Preterm, a free-standing abortion clinic in Washington, D.C. where abortion was legal. In addition to performing abortions for women who came from all over the country, Dr. Hodgson published her research on therapeutic abortion techniques and used her platform for public speaking on issues of reproductive choice.

Disappointed with the course that legal abortion has taken since *Roe*, she endured the snubs of her colleagues and former friends until the end of her career, but she never gave up the fight to make legal abortion safe and accessible for all women. Dr. Hodgson has said about Justice Blackmun, the author of *Roe v. Wade*, “I . . . rejoice in his greatness.” We rejoice in hers.

I toll the bell for Jane Hodgson, physician and courageous lawbreaker, January 23, 1915 to October 23, 2006.

William Sloane Coffin
June 1, 1924 — April 12, 2006

William Sloane Coffin was born into a wealthy New York family in 1924. He attended prep schools and graduated from Yale, where his friend George H. W. Bush got him into the Skull and Bones secret society.

Bill was an accomplished pianist and athlete, CIA agent, liberal clergyman, and principle activist in the civil rights, anti-war, and nuclear disarmament movements.

During the Korean War, he became a CIA agent. But he became disillusioned after learning of the CIA's role in overthrowing the Iranian Prime Minister in 1953 and in the Guatemalan coup in 1954.

He left, became a Presbyterian minister in 1958, and was Chaplain at Yale University until 1975. He took a leave in 1961 to run the first Peace Corps training programs.

In 1964 he became outraged at our involvement in Viet Nam and he became a strong opponent of the war and the draft. He organized busloads of Yale students to participate in civil rights freedom rides.

He was senior minister of New York's Riverside Church (an interdenominational UCC and American Baptist congregation) from 1976 to 1987, when he resigned to pursue disarmament activism full time as president of SANE/FREEZ. While at Riverside, he led the church to become the first UCC congregation to declare itself "open and affirming" of gays and lesbians.

In retirement, he lectured and taught and wrote books. Given six months to live in 2004 due to a weakened heart, he moved to Vermont to be near his brother.

He outlasted the prognosis, but died on April 12 in hospice care for congestive heart failure.

He once said, "Hope is a state of mind independent of the state of the world. If your heart's full of hope, you can be persistent when you can't be optimistic. You can keep the faith despite

the evidence, knowing that only in so doing has the evidence any chance of changing. So while I'm not optimistic, I'm always very hopeful."

I toll the bell for William Sloane Coffin, peace activist and minister, June 1, 1924 to April 12, 2006.



We remember all of these for whom the bell has been tolled and the others we have known and who have touched us with their lives.

In our sorrow and grief, we seek comfort.

The Ritual of the Burning Bowl

As the New Year begins, we stand at the threshold of opportunity. The bells have tolled for those who have died and for the year that is passing into memory.

And the bells ring in the new year, a fresh start. The tradition of making resolutions recognizes this as a time that invites letting go and new beginnings. To mark that, I invite you to participate in a ritual of the burning bowl.

What changes would you like to make in your life? What do you want to leave behind, and what do you want to embrace? Perhaps there is a special joy to treasure and commit to memory, a habit to break in order to free you from its grasp, a commitment or a plan to affirm and turn to action, or a grief or sorrow to release. This is a time to seek clarity — to let the past be gone — as the present unfolds into the future.

In a few moments you'll have an opportunity to commit your intentions to fire. Burning will lift them upward, committing them to action.

The ushers will bring slips of flash paper and pencils around. As you focus your attention, find a word or short phrase that represents your desire and write it on the paper.

The paper is specially treated to burn quickly and leave barely a trace of ash. It will burn so fast that you can safely hold it as it flares up.

In a moment I will light the flame in our bowl, and then you may come forward and place your paper into the flame, turning your intention

into energy and bright light as it is released to the universe. As you return to your seat, reflect on your commitment to this renewal of life.

[The congregation brings their flash paper forward and burns it in the lit burning bowl.]

Our intentions have been made and joined as they have been committed to the universe. We honor the commitments made to the fire and those that are held privately in the quiet places of our hearts.

The choices we make with clear intent have the power to change us and to change the world around us. May the commitments you have made and your intentions bring you closer to realizing your potential. May you be blessed with fulfillment in the New Year. The past and the future meet in the eternal now. May your vow be to make each day complete, a moment in the ceaseless flow of endless time.