

“The Tolling of the Bells”
Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley
January 3, 2010
The Revs. Judy Welles and Duane Fickeisen©

Invitation to Worship

It is our tradition to begin the calendar year with a service of Tolling the Bells in memory of those whose lives have ended in the past year. Many of them have been close to us — family members and friends. More often than not our relationships with them have been complex and cannot be described in a few simple words.

We grieve their passing, we cherish fond memories, and perhaps we ache from unresolved conflicts or things left unsaid. We remember the parts of their lives that were hard along with the parts that brought joy.

We will name them and toll the bell for them. Our task is to carry on, to live our lives fully, to offer compassion to others who grieve, and to seek paths of harmony and joy, even as we may feel knocked off balance, sad, angry, and maybe even relief that suffering has ended.

In addition to our family members and friends, many public figures have died in the last year. Some were well-known cultural icons, stars and celebrities, teachers and politicians, writers and reporters. Some have been unknown to us, yet nevertheless made a significant difference in our culture and in our lives. Inventors, champions of causes, innovators, and justice seekers.

We will offer brief eulogies for six who made a significant difference and who are exemplars.

As we remember both the personal and the public losses this morning, we will also offer the opportunity to mark the start of the new year with a commitment or perhaps a letting go of something that no longer serves you. We invite you to commit to our mission of transforming lives and caring for our world through specific actions you might make in the months ahead — actions that perhaps become living memorials to the deceased and carry out the quest for the good, the commitment to stand on the side of love.

We will offer our intentions of release and of embracing new resolutions to the burning bowl in a ritual of commitment.

Come, let us worship together.

Eulogies for Public Figures

When someone we love dies, our loss is deeply personal and heartfelt. I'm struck with emotion every year when we conduct this service, and I hear the reverberations of the bowl gong hover in the air long after the person's name is spoken. So, too, do their memories linger in our hearts long after their own hearts have stopped beating.

Yet our lives are also affected by the deaths of people we never knew. Or to say it more clearly, our lives have been affected by the work of their lives, and therefore it behooves us to note their passing and thank them for all that they did on our behalf or

on behalf of the people they served. There is so much that we take for granted — in terms of public witness, scientific breakthroughs, creativity in the arts, philanthropic efforts. But it is important to remember, to give thanks, and to be inspired in our own lives by those who have paved the way for us.

It's always a challenge for Duane and me to decide whom to eulogize in this service. So many noteworthy lives end every year... So we have a few criteria that help us narrow the field to just six people.

We didn't include actors or entertainers whose fame was based primarily on popularity, such as Michael Jackson or Farrah Fawcett. Nor will we talk about those who were "famous" for deeds which we don't condone, such as Vietnam War defense secretary Robert McNamara or televangelist Oral Roberts. And although they did influence American culture, we decided to omit the inventor of the Kevlar vest and the master distiller at the Jack Daniel's distillery. Some who died were so well-known that you have undoubtedly already had the opportunity to grieve their passing, such as Edward Kennedy and Walter Cronkite. We have included only Americans in our list, although we are, of course, unable to name the hundreds of Americans who died last year in Iraq and Afghanistan in the service of their country's unpopular wars.

The six people we have chosen to eulogize for you today were remarkable in some way, perhaps for the changes they wrought in American culture, perhaps as symbols of the age they occupied, perhaps because they stood out for us as emblematic of all the others with whom they share the year of their death. Let us honor and remember:

Claiborne DeBorda Pell

Imagine this patrician senator, the only child of an immensely wealthy couple, who was literally "to the manor born," as his ancestral land holdings, which dated back to the 18th century, comprised much of what is now Westchester County, New York, centered in the community of Pelham Manor. He came from a family that included fighters on both sides of the American Revolution, five members of Congress and a vice president, and his father served in the Diplomatic Corps as minister to Portugal and Hungary under President Roosevelt.

What a pleasant incongruity — that his name will forever be associated with the federal grant program that has enabled 54 million low and moderate-income students to acquire a college education — the Pell Grant. He also sponsored the legislation that founded the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities.

When Claiborne Pell first ran for the Rhode Island Senate seat in 1960, Democratic Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy called him "the most unelectable man in America." But not only was he elected for six consecutive Senate terms, he always won by at least a 64% majority in a largely Catholic, blue-collar state. Despite his background of wealth and privilege, Pell expressed the definition of his job in seven simple words: "Translate ideas into actions and help people."

After graduating *cum laude* from Princeton in 1940, Pell worked as a roustabout in the Oklahoma oil wells. After the war broke out, he drove trucks carrying emergency supplies to prisoners of war in Germany, and was arrested several times by the Nazi government. Four months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Pell enlisted in

the Coast Guard as a ship's cook. So he had a feel for how ordinary people live and work, and always enjoyed strong support from labor.

He was committed to maritime and foreign affairs issues, strongly in favor of abortion rights, a consistent vote for labor, an ardent advocate of arms control, and a strong opponent of the Vietnam War. Unfailingly polite, he also had many quirks, such as jogging into his eighties wearing a tweed sport coat and shabby dress pants. One of his favorite sayings was "I always let the other fellow have my way."

I toll the bell for Claiborne Pell, U.S. Senator and friend of the humble, Nov. 22, 1918 – January 1, 2009.

Bernadette Cozart

Bernadette Cozart was born in 1949 in Cleveland. She was a self-taught horticulturist. After moving to Harlem in 1989, she took a job with the City Parks and Recreation Department as a gardener.

One of her first tasks was to clean up a 16-acre park that surrounds Gracey Mansion, the mayor's home, and was a hangout place for truant teenagers doing drugs. Some of the teens followed her around and she invited them to help with the gardening, which they took to with gusto.

In collaboration with Dr. Barbara Barlow, a pediatric surgeon who was concerned about the lack of safe places for kids, she formed the Greening of Harlem coalition to improve open spaces and make them safe and attractive. While the city supported her efforts, it provided no financial support for the projects, which depended on donations.

She noted that when a playground was cleaned up and trees and gardens planted, soon other neighborhood spaces began to be planted and window boxes appeared in what she referred to as a domino effect. Dr. Barlow noted that there was a 42% decrease in serious playground injuries after the cleanup projects.

Bernadette moved to Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 2002 and became president of the Allentown Garden Club. She launched a city-wide beautification project modeled on Greening of Harlem.

Ms. Cozart died of a heart attack during a water aerobics class on July 27. She once said, "If you can take a garbage-strewn lot, or anything else in your neighborhood that you don't like, and turn it into a thing of beauty that benefits the community — a thing of usefulness — then you know you can transform other things. You can transform things you don't like in your own life and in yourself — and that's power."

I toll the bell for Bernadette Cozart, horticulturist and community activist, May 17, 1949 – July 27, 2009.

The Reverend Father Thomas Berry

When he was eleven years old, a boy who loved to wander in the woods and fields of his native North Carolina stumbled upon a meadow dotted with lilies, and had a flash of insight that shaped a lifetime of thinking. "Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good; what is opposed to this meadow or negates it is not good."

Thus began the work of William Nathan Berry, who took the name Thomas when he entered a monastery of the Passionist Order of the Catholic Church. Thomas Berry became a student of the world and a writer of profound influence, with his call to humanity to save nature in order to save itself. He was one of the first to propose that the ecological crisis we face is not just a crisis of science or policy; it is a crisis of the spirit.

From his academic beginnings as a historian of world cultures and religions, Berry developed into what he described as a “geologist,” a scholar of Earth and its evolutionary processes.

He believed that a viable future for the human community could only be attained if an entirely different relationship developed between humans and the planet they inhabit. That future would be difficult to achieve, Berry realized, and would require what he called “the great work” — in politics and law, economics and business, education, and religion. “From here on,” he explained in a 2006 interview, “the primary judgment of all human institutions, professions, programs and activities will be determined by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship.”

One of the guests at his memorial service commented that “Thomas represented an older, deeper, more primary source of wisdom, one we need so much today. He brought that out in people, gave expression to the unexpressed in so many of us, made us feel less alone, less alienated, perhaps a little less sorrowful and more hopeful about what we can do about the desecration of the planet... I am grateful for the healing vision Thomas has given, both for my own healing and for that of the larger culture. May it endure for generations to come.”

I toll the bell for Thomas Berry, Catholic priest and ecotheologian, November 9, 1914 – June 1, 2009.

Millard Dean Fuller

Millard Fuller was born at the beginning of 1935 in Lanette, Alabama, a small town near the Georgia border. His mother died when he was three. His father worked in the Bleachery and Dye Works and later ran his own small grocery store and ice cream shop. Millard earned a law degree from the University of Alabama in the same class with Morris Dees in 1960.

Both men decided they wanted to earn a lot of money, and became successful partners practicing law and marketing goods like tractor seat covers and cookbooks. By the time he was 29, Millard Fuller was a self-made millionaire, but the stress of his focus on earning money was a threat to his marriage.

To save the marriage, he and his wife determined to give their money to good causes and to live lives of Christian service. They moved to an intentionally multi-racial farming community and began to build houses for low-income families, asking that they pay only for the cost of materials and not charging them any interest. After a mission trip to Africa, they returned and expanded Partnership Housing to form Habitat for Humanity International.

Millard and his wife, Linda, were both fired by the board of Habitat in 2005 after a rift over organizational direction and charges of sexual harassment that were never

substantiated. They then founded the Fuller Center for Housing and continued to support both organizations with speaking and fundraising efforts.

Habitat for Humanity is active in 92 countries and has built over 350,000 houses in 3,000 communities, housing 1.75 million people. For his work to provide affordable housing, Fuller was awarded the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor granted by the United States, as well as 50 honorary degrees and several other significant awards.

He died unexpectedly after a brief illness on February 3. The work of both Habitat for Humanity and the Fuller Center for Housing continues.

I toll the bell for Millard Dean Fuller, affordable housing advocate and builder, January 3, 1935 — February 3, 2009.

Judith Fingeret Krug

Judith Krug credits her parents for inspiring her passion regarding freedom of speech and access to published materials. As a twelve-year old, she was reading a sex-education book under the covers with a flashlight one night. When her mother came into her room and threw back the covers, demanding to know what she was reading, she sheepishly held up the book. “Well for heaven’s sake, turn on your bedroom light so you don’t ruin your eyes,” her mother replied. And that was the end of it.

As a librarian, Judith Krug fought passionately against the idea of banning books. She was the Director of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom since it was created in 1967, and was the founder of Banned Books Week; more recently, she fought laws and regulations to limit children’s access to the Internet. If you’ve ever checked out *Huckleberry Finn*, *Little Black Sambo*, or *Catcher in the Rye* from a public library, you can thank Judith Krug.

Her deep commitment to access of information in libraries extended to materials she found personally offensive, like *The Blue Book*, the handbook of the ultra-conservative John Birch Society. “My personal proclivities have nothing to do with how I react as a librarian,” Ms. Krug said in a 1972 interview. “Library service in this country should be based on the concept of intellectual freedom, of providing all pertinent information so a reader can make decisions for himself.”

In 1992, Madonna’s ode to kinky intimacy, *Sex*, led to an outcry from those who felt it was too racy for libraries. A First Amendment absolutist who felt libraries should be allowed to carry any material that was legal, Krug defended the entertainer’s book — or at least the right of libraries to stock it. “The book is sleazy trash, but it should be in every medium-sized library in the United States,” Krug told the Chicago Tribune.

She once said that the importance of her work was made clear when she read *And Tango Makes Three* to her granddaughter’s class. The book is often the target of censors because it’s about two male penguins who “adopt” an unclaimed egg. When she was finished reading, a girl she later learned was being raised by two women stood and applauded.

I toll the bell for Judith Fingeret Krug, librarian and advocate for First Amendment rights, March 15, 1940 – April 11, 2009.

Sylvia Levin

Sylvia Levin was born in Brooklyn, New York in the fall of 1917 and grew up there and in New Jersey. In the 1940's she moved to Santa Monica, California. As a single mother, she worked in an aircraft plant, a garment factory, at the Los Angeles Farmers' Market and as a beach attendant in Santa Monica.

When the 18th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18 in 1971, her son, Chuck, who was a political consultant, started First Vote, a campaign to register young people to vote.

Inspired by his work, Sylvia began what became a full-time volunteer job as voter registrar, setting up sidewalk voter-registration tables six days a week in regular locations. Every Sunday she was at the Westwood Farmers' Market. On Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, she was outside the Post Office in the Westwood Federal Building. On Fridays she was outside the post office or a bank in Malibu and on Saturdays she was outside a jewelry store in Venice.

She stored her table, chair, and posters and supplies inside the businesses and commuted by bus. She never owned a car — imagine that in Los Angeles!

She kept track of registrations and reached a total count well over 47,000, recognized as a record both in California and in the US. On her best days, she would register 60 voters, but the number dropped to an average of four a day in the 2000s.

Once when someone who had been observing her work complimented her and said "You're serving the public in a very big way. You should be proud of yourself," she was so surprised that she wrote his words down.

She was still registering voters beyond her 91st birthday, right up to the day she suffered a stroke and was hospitalized.

"Voting gives you the right to voice what's in your heart on paper — on the ballot," she said. "People who are registering for the first time in their lives leave this table just flying. They know they've taken a big step. ... No matter what the issues are — such as the environment, the war in Iraq, Social Security, health care — citizens are involved. You keep the power to vote forever."

She leaves a legacy of civic involvement and 10s of thousands of new voters.

I toll the bell for Sylvia Levin, volunteer voter registrar, September 14, 1917 – June 25, 2009.

Benediction

One Thing
Kendyl Gibbons

There is, finally, only one thing required of us:
that is, to take life whole, the bright and dark together;
to live the life that is given us with courage and humor and truth.
We have such a little moment, out of the vastness of time,
for all our wondering and loving.
Therefore, let there be no half-heartedness;
rather, let the soul be ardent —
in its pain, in its yearning, in its praise.
Then shall peace enfold our days,
and glory shall not fade from our lives.

