

Preface:

This presentation is not meant to be "all about me", or a counselling session, but it's what I know. The only knowledge I have to share is my own life experience. Bear with me as I am an open book and sometimes repeat chapters, (some of you have heard parts of my story") but life is a work in progress. I am on a journey and this community right here is part of the path I feel fortunate to have found. So here we go.....

Repairs on the Road of my Spiritual Journey

Poetically translated to "golden joinery," *kintsugi*, is the centuries-old Japanese art of fixing broken pottery. Rather than rejoin ceramic pieces with a camouflaged adhesive, the kintsugi technique employs a special urushi lacquer, made from tree sap, dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Once completed, beautiful seams of gold glint in the conspicuous cracks of ceramic wares, giving a one-of-a-kind appearance to each "repaired" piece.

This unique method celebrates each artifact's unique history by emphasizing its fractures and breaks instead of hiding or disguising them.

In addition to serving as an aesthetic principle, kintsugi has long represented prevalent philosophical ideas. Namely, the practice is related to the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, which calls for seeing beauty in the flawed or imperfect. These scars symbolize painful life experiences. They are not to be hidden, but make us who we are.

Therapy with Kintsugi invites you to increase self-compassion and compassion for others as you embrace your imperfections, and get to know and accept all parts of you.

What comes to mind when you hear the word repair? We just had our broken windshield repaired. I am working on repairing my relationship with my sister-in-law in order to rejoin my brother's life. Our country is in **bad** state of repair, and we will be searching for the tools to cope with and look for solutions. My broken heart needs to be repaired at times and fortunately love is the tool for fixing that. Today I am focused on my spiritual journey and how UU is a part of repairing the cracks along the way.

Audrey Hepburn said, "People, even more than things have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed and redeemed; never throw out anyone".

In the past two years the school district has hired Josh Varner to share his knowledge of trauma in children and how we as individuals can be their heroes. "We all play a role in the development and healing of these kids," said Josh. "A lot of time we think we need to know what happened to help them (students), but we don't," Varner said. "Safety and connection are needed. The kids that are the hardest to love need it the most. You don't have to fix what they're going through, just make sure they're not alone with it. They **can't learn** until they feel safe and connected."

I see this all the time in our elementary school. It can be a simple connection or attention to an individual student that might

change everything for that child for that day, and hopefully that one step up will be a foundation for their future.

As Frederick Douglas said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

My personal spiritual journey feels like fragmented pieces at times. Basically, I don't know what I believe. If there is a God that we pray too, why isn't life perfect. Gods will, free will, and a belief in the afterlife just gets jumbled and I tend to retreat from any thoughts or mention of God. But I do believe in spirituality, I can't really explain it, but maybe it's peace, or love that is free of judgment. Maybe spirituality is a deep understanding and acceptance of oneself and others. I have also seen and felt the presence of those who have passed and think of it as messages from the universe, not necessarily a god or a connection to "heaven".

My rebellion of organized religion began in the third grade when I decided to be really good for one whole month. I was ultra-aware all month of how not to sin, which I don't think was actually any different than any other month as a young child. I was so proud that day as I went to confession. All eight grades walked from school to the church to confess our sins to the mystery priest behind the confessional. I was eager and played on the words we'd rehearsed since first grade. "Father forgive me for I have NOT sinned." Instead of the praise I was looking forward to, I was scolded for lying and told that of course I sinned and was given a long list of prayers to recite. I was crushed. The following month I did what we all did and traded sins in line, "What are you going to say", or no I think I said that

last month. Or as Holly recalls, she confessed to looking at dirty pictures when she didn't even know what a dirty picture was. I picture a photo album dropped in a mud puddle. Basically, we were taught to lie, at least in confession.

I was raised in a very large loving family in Billings, Montana. My parents are my idols, and I miss them every day. My siblings are all very dear to my heart. I was fortunate, safe, happy and loved. My parents came from a small town in Minnesota and were devout Catholics. As a kid, being catholic meant little to me other than I did like the music at church. I come from a very athletic driven family, which was lots of fun, but music wasn't front and center at home, so I liked that part of church. In the seventh grade I asked my parents if I could leave the catholic school and go to the public school with a new neighborhood friend I met over the summer. I was the fifth of eight kids and the first to decent. My younger siblings followed and were spared the drama of monthly confession and a Monsignor who was known to spank kids if you were "really bad".

After I graduated High School and was in and out of college, I decided to go on a journey to explore my beliefs. At 19 or 20 years of age, I hitchhiked from Billings, Montana to Washington DC. On this journey I wrote poetry, contemplated life and religion and really tried to become a Christian and understand what that meant. In the end I didn't find "Jesus" but I did find my way home.

As Deepak Chopra said, "If you restore balance in your own self, you will be contributing immensely to the healing of the world."

When the dark truths of Catholicism and the circumstances that affected my family came to light, I was and still am angry. I became very bitter and with good reason. We believe my mother was sexually abused by priests as a child, and the monsignor who spanked us is named in a documentary because he sexually abused children. The part of the story that is the most infuriating is that there were no consequences for these men; when they were caught they simply moved them to a new community to abuse more children. I guess they believed in forgiveness and just forgave themselves or confessed to each other.

However, the lesson I learned as a child, from my family and my upbringing, is that what's important is that I am a kind and good person. I realized at some point that I didn't need a priest to keep track of, or forgive my sins, I just needed to not sin. So, when I was old enough to decide, I did not go to church. The only exceptions were my parents' funerals. When my mother was still alive and I drove to Billings weekly to stay for several days, I would take her to church and hang out in the parking lot. I know it hurt her, but I couldn't do it. I struggled to understand her love of Catholicism, but had to honor that it was that important to her.

As a young parent I didn't think about taking my kids to church. I just didn't. I taught them to be kind and empathetic individuals, but I was completely against organized religion. Then one day my ten-year-old told me he was an atheist and somehow that didn't feel right. Thanks to JoLynn we found our way to the UU fellowship. That was years ago and once the kids stopped going, I did too. Luckily, as I got older, I felt a need to get back

to my spiritual journey and started to attend fellowship regularly. I honestly don't know what I believe, but this fellowship means so much to me because it is about **people**, caring for others and honesty without judgement.

Barack Obama said, "Keep exploring. Keep dreaming. Keep asking why. Don't settle for what you already know. Never stop believing in the power of your ideas, your imagination, your hard work to change the world."

Another crack in my vase, happened when I was ten years old. My grandmother was shot four times, in her own home, with her own gun. She had been out shopping and a nineteen-year-old boy who was schizophrenic had gone into her house, had a snack, taken a bath, and honestly thought it was his home and she was the intruder. I was ten and the most amazing woman I loved was murdered. I struggled with this for years. As a teenager I became pen pals with prisoners in Deer Lodge, Montana and actually visited them. I was trying to wrap my head around a person who could take the life of another person. I am still unable to process the loss of my grandmother even though I know the mental health of that young man was so sad. But, a few weeks ago Victor talked about listening to his patients without judgement and following the UU principal of the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals. I admitted that I am struggling with seeing any worth in this young man and have trouble grasping forgiveness. After fifty-five years this has been a fragmented piece of who I am. My spiritual journey was renewed that day because Mandy, who I hadn't even met yet, came up to me and said, "You need to practice self-forgiveness, you need to

forgive yourself for not being able to forgive him." She provided the golden glue to repair that fragmented piece of my soul. My spiritual journey continues but I feel I am on the right path, in this room, with this fellowship. No one claims to know all the answers but we aren't afraid to ask the questions.

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