

Good morning! My name is Debbie Lee and I am a Unitarian-Universalist. Boy do I love saying that. I am a Unitarian-Universalist. For a great part of my life, I really wanted to say what exactly I “was,” but I never felt comfortable with any label.

I grew up (for the most part) in Skokie, Illinois. During my most formative years, it was, to a great extent, a predominantly Jewish suburb. My parents are both half Jewish. I would tell people I was Jewish. And, technically, I was. My mother’s maternal grandmother was Jewish. Technically, that made my grandmother, my mother, and then me, Jewish. However, in reality, that was it. My parents made a brief but somewhat valiant attempt at “being” Jewish. We even joined a temple for almost 2 years, mostly in some obscure try by my parents at giving my sister and me “some religion.” However, seeing as they didn’t practice any religion, and none of us knew what was going on half the time at temple, their little experiment was not especially successful.

My closest friends in grade school and high school were Catholic. Since I had a Catholic grandmother, that was my next religious “area of interest.” I enjoyed going to Mass. The ritual, the feeling I got in church, the spirituality of the whole thing. Midnight mass before Christmas was my favorite and still is. Yet, I didn’t always agree with what the priest was sermonizing and as much as I liked attending mass, I had no desire to go on a regular basis, so maybe this was not a great fit either.

In college, my “religious bend” was pretty much tied into my roommate and/or boyfriend at the time.

Fast forward a few years. . . . life was too “involved” for any religion and I didn’t feel a need for it at that point in my life; a few years more, and time to get married. Now the fun began. Between my husband and I, we had at least 3 Christian denominations and Judaism to chose from. Hmmm, which relatives can we infuriate? We settled on a judge and disappointed everyone.

A couple years later, along came our first daughter. Time to baptize her right? At the same time, my sister-in-law and her husband (our daughter’s god parents) suffered a still born daughter. It was horrific for everyone. We were at a loss. They were not mentally prepared to god parent our infant daughter Jenna, when they had just lost

theirs. By the time our second daughter came along, they were still not ready to deal with god-parenthood and so no baptism. Katherine's god-mom was patient and caring. When we were ready, she was ready. Soon enough, daughter number 3. Now what do we do?!

I had been attending Catholic church and had been bringing Jenna (our oldest) who was about 5 at the time. One Sunday, as we drove home from church, in all of her 5 years old glory, asked me if I agreed with what Father Pat said. I hadn't really given it much thought until that moment. . . however, I realized that I really didn't. In fact, I completely disagreed with him. Epiphany time. . . what was I doing bringing up my kids in a faith that I disagreed with?!

I started "church shopping." I went to the Lutheran church, the Methodist church, a community church, a United Church of Christ . . . none felt right and in fact, felt wrong. Now what? My dad suggested the Unitarian church. I loved it the 1st time out. I had never felt so comfortable, so at home in a new place. This really was my belief structure. And. . . I was in community with others who held similar beliefs. Wow!

Time to try this one out on the kids. I had pretty much decided that this was where I belonged, what about my kids? I was never "indoctrinated" in a faith by my parents. For them, it was important that I explored what I thought, what I believed and why. Sound familiar? My kids really liked the place. Could this be real? I loved that at 3 and 5 years old, they questioned what they learned and talked about it. I loved that they liked saying that they were UU's. The ability to explore faith and spirituality and not be force fed rules and doctrine was wonderful. We were home!

Every service I attended furthered my faith in this. At a training session of I attended shortly after coming to the church regularly, we were asked what we thought God meant. One of the participants said that God was somewhat "Star Wars"-esque, kind of "let the force be with you." Could it be that I was not the only one who thought this?! Time to sign the book!

I have never looked back. This church, this faith, is my home: physically, spiritually, and more. I love exploring my beliefs as they grow and even change a bit. I have learned that I am a humanist, but strongly believe in many of the morals taught from the bible and from other faiths as well. I accept Jesus as a prophet, but also find validity in teachings from other faiths' prophets. I also feel a connection with life around me. In the Return of the Jedi (okay, another Star Wars reference), Obi Wan says that he feels "disruption in the force" when a planet is obliterated. At times, I have had similar feelings. Reading about the death of someone, or even some animal, I often feel

heartache; just as I feel joy with the birth of a baby or a wedding, even of someone I don't even know.

I don't believe in the afterworlds of heaven and hell. But, I do believe we live on in the hearts of those who we leave behind. I believe that I have been gifted with this life and that I will try to do what I can to make this world a better place and that given all I have, not a day goes by that I do not know that I am truly blessed.

I have met and gotten to know some incredible people because of this church. I cannot imagine more of a blessing. Friends from other faiths tell me that they are praying for me because surely, I will not be "allowed" into heaven for my beliefs about who or what God is and my feelings about gay marriages and abortion. But, then again, they ARE praying for me right? And, as Bill Murray says in Caddyshack, "So, I got that going for me." Life is good.

So, . . . in affirming my faith in this faith, in this church, let me end in saying, thank you to everyone who has made me feel at home here. I love being a Unitarian-Universalist!