

## **Invocation**

Invocation - by Angela Herrera

Don't leave your broken heart at the door;  
bring it to the altar of life.

Don't leave your anger behind;  
it has high standards and the world needs vision.

Bring them with you,  
and your joy and your passion.

Bring your loving,  
and your courage and your conviction.

Bring your need for healing,  
and your power to heal.

There is work to do  
and you have all that you need to do it  
right here in this room.

Come, let us worship.

# Embracing Meditation

- Mary Rockwood Lane

Deep within us

There is a place of perfect beauty

From which we all come.

The place of our birth

The place to which we will return

In this place ...

Is our greatest love

Our most profound memories

Our brightest moments

Being loved perfectly

Our greatest sadness

Our Fears

Our Pain.

In the center of this place

Is the vortex of love that heals

The vortex expresses our most creative passions.

It is who we really are.

We will now hold silence for a time. [Time]

# Sermon

I'll start with a quote from Neil Armstrong that Allysson MacDonald used in a sermon earlier this summer. It really resonated with me and has led me to write this sermon. Here's the quote:

“The single observation I would offer for your consideration is that some things are beyond your control. You can lose your health to illness or accident. You can lose your wealth to all manner of unpredictable sources. What are not easily stolen from you without your cooperation are your principles and your values. They are your most important possessions and, if carefully selected and nurtured, will well serve you and your fellow man.”

— **Neil Armstrong**

I think one of our most important tasks in life is to discover the principles that we will guide us as we live our lives.

- What we most believe in.
- How we treat others.
- What we will work for.
- In short, who we really are, down deep.

The process of determining who we are is a process of self-discovery. I think we have all been engaged in this process for all of our lives, whether we think about it consciously or not. There are things that we can choose to do that will greatly enhance our ability to make this a conscious effort, or to make it bear the most important fruits in the way that we experience life.

Rev. Forrest Church, the senior minister at the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City who died 10 years ago, had a simply stated mantra for living an authentic life. He said there are three special ways: "Want what you have. Do what you can. Be who you are." Even though this is a simply stated mantra, it is at times difficult to follow. The conventionally accepted behavior of polite society sometimes flows in the opposite direction.

So, looking at the last part of the mantra: How do we discover who we really are?

I'd like to give you three stories of how this can happen in a person's life.

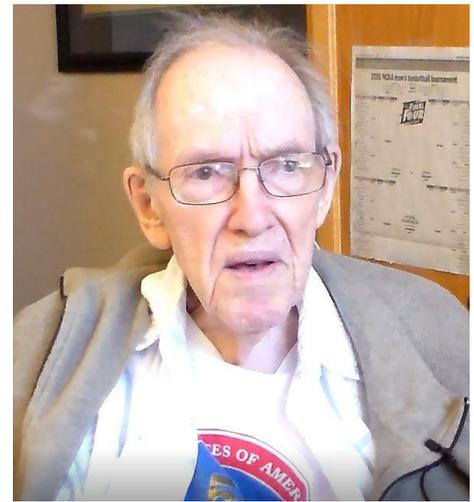
### **My father's principles**

My father Harwood Kolsky was raised in very humble circumstances on a farm and small town in western Kansas. But, even though material resources were scarce, he had the advantages of having a keen intellect and loving parents who encouraged it. He went to the University of Kansas and eventually got a PhD from Harvard in Physics.

My dad was always my champion, my ideal, and my general role-model of what it is to be a good and caring person. My brothers and I were raised with high expectations, common sense, and love. Our parents took us unflinchingly to church every Sunday and lived their values with their lives. One thing that stays with me is what the minister said at my mother's funeral: "This was a life well lived." So true of both of my parents.

When I was hospitalized with depression, he came to visit. I could see that he was greatly saddened by the circumstances. For a time, I felt I failed him and all I was expected and hoped to do with my life. But, he was there, a presence of support and understanding. That meant the world to me. He remained my champion and told me and others that he is proud of me in my work as a minister. What a blessing he has been to me and to nearly everyone he knew.

So, where did that come from? How did he get this? I'd like to read some words from a video I made of him at age 94 shortly before he died, where he recalled an incident from when he was 4 or 5 years old that made a real impression on him. He and his family lived in a farm in north-western Kansas about a mile away from a small town called Kanona. Here is his remembrance:



There were two elevators – grain elevators

Which were on the railroad track

That was the main reason for Kanona's being there

It was where wheat was brought in to the elevators

And one of them was owned by the farmer's association

And the other was a private association

And the private association was owned by a family named Siler

Their younger son was two years old and he was ill

And I knew that some of the women there in Kanona

Arranged for their children to come and play with him

Because he was very lonesome

I remember coming there and we didn't have a lot in common

So he wasn't interested in anything else

So anyway it was my first situation like that where I had to

Do something for someone else's good other than myself

He gradually sickened and eventually died

It made quite an impression I think on my young life

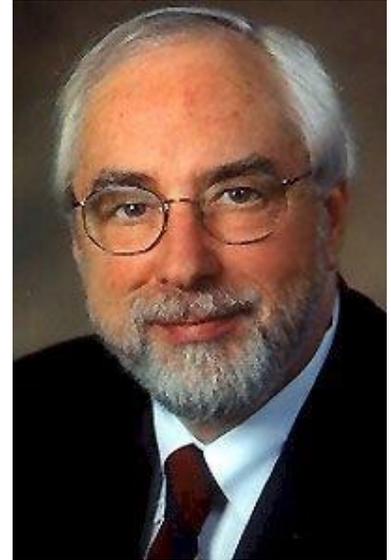
To see that aspect of things

I know that his tombstone is there at the Kanona cemetery

So, very near the end of his life at age 94 he could remember a situation from when he was 4 or 5 years old that began his belief in the principle of doing something for someone else's good other than himself. And he lived this out in many ways in his life, including when he came to visit me in the hospital.

**Rev. Dr. Edward Frost**

The next example is from my colleague Rev. Dr. Edward Frost, emeritus minister of the UU Congregation in Atlanta, Georgia. He tells this story, ending with a suggestion:



I was seven years old, maybe eight, being raised in England. It was the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. We lived in a large city, across from a park. In winter, when it snowed, we kids took our sleds to the long hill in the center of the park.

That winter, we discovered that the hill had been adopted by the Italians—Italian prisoners of war. The war had long been over for them. They were held in minimum security while governments made the deals that would send them back home. Confined to camps during the night, they were free to roam the city during the daylight hours.

They had discovered the park and the iced-over hill. They had no skis but their big hob-nailed boots served well enough in a sport second nature to them. Knees bent, arms outspread, they flew down the hill laughing, shouting in their wonderful, so un-English language, thrilling in the familiar bite of the cold wind. They had survived. They were alive. And, soon, they would be going home.

We found each other, the children and the Italians. The first brave boy—it was not I—allowed himself to be picked up, slung up and over and onto the shoulders of an Alpine skier sans skis, and borne

laughing and screeching down the hill. The adventure went on for days. We rushed to the hill after school and early in the frosty weekend mornings. Friends were made. Friendship and trust.

One evening, I came into the house flushed and breathless.

“What on earth have you been doing?” asked my father.

“Playing with the Italians!” I said with joy.

My father was furious. The Italians were the enemy.

“But the war is over. They don't have any guns. They weren't bombing us. They didn't even want to fight us.”

He slapped my face. That was terrible, the most terrible moment of my life. Terrible more in the shock of it than the pain. My father had never hit me. Never did again. And—here's the moment remembered that started the story flowing—I remember looking full into his anger and saying, “Alright. But I'm going back.” It's odd, but I don't remember anything of what happened next.

I realized what the story meant. It was a story about self-discovery, personal power, and taking a stand that would make a difference.

Once after telling this story, a young woman came up to me and said, “My grandfather was an Italian prisoner of war in your city. He often spoke of playing with the boys in the park. Thank you for playing with my grandfather.”

## **My Story**

And finally, I'd like to share a story of how I realized I could make a difference. It was in this congregation in 1995 or 1996. I was in the worship committee and we were figuring out the worship calendar for the next several months. Someone suggested that we talk about spiritual autobiographies. It occurred to me that I had a story to tell about my journey with depression that I hadn't yet shared publicly, and in fact had several years backed out of sharing at the Hayward congregation where I was a member. So I raised my hand and volunteered to lead that service. And lead it I did, being unsure of how it would be received. After the service there was a very positive response with many people thanking me for telling the story because they or a member of their family had a similar experience, and this message from me had helped to take away the stigma that they had felt. This was a seminal note for me: the start of my ministry – a significant milestone in my life letting me know how I could make a difference.



### **Try it out**

Edward Frost said: Somewhere in us is a story in which we are the hero, fearless before gods and giants, knowing for a certainty that right makes might. Each of you has a story, waiting to be remembered, about the power you had and have still to make a difference. Begin to tell your story to someone—even though you may not know yet that you know it. Just begin by saying, “The first time I realized I could make a difference was. . . .” The story will rush forward to be told.

So, as a way of getting us to take a step on this journey to discovering who we are, I'd like to take his the advice and try it out this morning. I'd like you to pair up with someone here, and each take 2 minutes saying the lines: "The first time I realized I could make a difference was. . . ." and then let the story flow. Pick one person to start. I'll ring the bell after 2 minutes so that the other person can tell their story.

[Sharing happens here]

I'm wondering how that went for you? Please share with me during coffee hour. I'd love to hear it.

My hope is that these kinds of explorations will lead you to discover who you are, and in the process find the principles that you are living your life by – the things most precious to you. For, as Neal Armstrong said, "They are your most important possessions and, if carefully selected and nurtured, will well serve you and your fellow man."

So may it be.

Amen.

## **Benediction**

Want what you have.

Do what you can.

Be who you are.

- Forrest Church

Amen.