



UUFL Weekly Newsletter

Sunday, September 27, 10:45 AM

Program: " How to survive mentally and spiritually during a pandemic"



Barbara Cavin will be our speaker Sunday September 27th, for our onsite and Zoom services. Her presentation will explore ways of finding coping skills that keep us focused on both our health and our spirituality.

You are invited to join this inspiring presentation via Zoom or onsite at the Fellowship.

Zoom Sunday Service Link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8780546386?pwd=dIFMVHNrSDcwS1N0TE5aazlUWnVadz09>

Carol's Words of Wisdom Collection:

"Women will have achieved true equality when men share with them the responsibility of bringing up the next generation."



"My mother told me to be a lady. And for her, that meant be your own person, be independent"

"When a thoughtless or unkind word is spoken, best tune out. Reacting in anger or annoyance will not advance one's ability to persuade."

"Fight for the things that you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you."

(Ruth Bader Ginsburg)

UUFL Financial Support:

Those of you who wish to contribute financially can mail your contributions to:

UUFL P O Box 3451 Longview, TX 75606. If you would like to contribute electronically, contact Tammy.

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Our Favorite Story Teller (Kindness and Cruelty, and Their Possible Origins)

It would be inappropriate to talk here about politics, but perhaps we can talk about kindness.



I don't know much about kindness, except what it feels like when people are kind to me, how I feel when I behave with kindness to others, and how frightening it is when others appear to be bereft of compassion. That, after all, is what I'm running in circles about – my fear of those who seem to have no kindness and express only anger and cruelty toward people who differ from them.

I used to think that every aspect of our character was imprinted on us by the nurture we received when we were babies and young children. I used to think that. But I've spent close to 40 years of my life working with humans, and they've been most educational for me. I've had to realize that some humans are born to be kind, and some are born with a wide streak of cruelty and little or no kindness at all. It seems that there's not much way of fixing them, those people who lack kindness, or empathy if you will. I've decided that kindness is an innate quality.

I'm just this minute realizing that a little boy I'll call Ricardo taught me this a long time ago when I was teaching in Albuquerque. I taught gifted elementary children in a school that carried the highest special education population in the city. It was in an aging neighborhood, one with lots of grandparent-aged residents and few school-aged children. So Special Education kids were brought to our school by bus from all over the district. Among those Special Ed kids was a class complement of children with visual impairments. One of those kids was Ricardo. He was a third-grader when I met him. His visual impairment was of the most severe sort – he had no eyes. He was a handsome little boy and a bright one. His teacher, Carolina, became my good friend, and she and I often shared our kids. Carolina, and her teaching assistant, Marta, were both native Spanish speakers, so we could include bilingual education in each week's learning for both sets of children. And the visually handicapped kids enjoyed the adventures my kids cooked up.

Ricardo was just like the rest of my gifted kids, except that he couldn't see. As we included him in more of my students' doings, my kids could see a kindred spirit in Ricardo. And I learned, from Carolina and Ricardo, how to work with a sightless child. By third grade, Ricardo was reading Braille so well that he was in a regular classroom for reading time. He read in the top group of Ms. Jones's class of Regular Education kids. He could also beat my kids all hollow playing the game called Simon, which was popular then, a circular plastic form that had four touchpads in four basic colors. These pads lit up, and each emitted a different musical note as its light came on, and the task was to be the person who could touch the lit and sounding pad first. Playing the game entirely on spatial orientation and hearing, Ricardo could beat my sighted kids all hollow time after time. This alone won the respect of my assigned students. They accepted and admired Ricardo, and they learned how to accommodate their blind friend

when accommodation was needed. Ricardo provided the best education the children and I got during the years I worked at that school, where I got to watch a bunch of sighted kids interacting with one child who couldn't see.

So I, who assumed that early childhood experiences form our character, believed that Ricardo had lived all his life surrounded by love and kindness. That's what I had been taught, and what I assumed, until I learned about Ricardo's parents, and about his first fourteen months. His two dear parents, who incidentally were steeped in a very fundamentalist form of Christianity, had coped with not being able to have children of their own by adopting two little boys. Their first child was three or four years old when they found fourteen-month-old Ricardo, lying in a crib in a foundling home, blind, helpless, and tiny, far under the size and weight one would expect for a child of his age. He had what was then called Failure to Thrive Syndrome. Overworked caregivers in the home had given him only basic physical care – they changed his diapers and gave him his bottle. He wasn't taking sufficient nutrition for normal growth, and his development was at the level of a child more than a year younger than his actual age. I would guess that most adults would have turned away from such a child, small and wizened and silent. He had long since given up crying, and he had no language. But Mr. and Mrs. Rivera fell in love with him, and they adopted him. This is the sort of miracle I believe in – a miracle of love and kindness. It brings tears to my eyes to write about it all these years later.

Ricardo was a joy to me, to Carolina and Marta, and to my gifted students. He joined my group of kids with enthusiasm, and they soon learned to work and play in ways that accommodated his blindness. He had learned to play beep ball, which is softball with a ball that emits a beep at regular intervals, so that sightless players can find it by its sound. Recess with Ricardo often meant time to play beep ball. Again, Ricardo could compete well with sighted playmates.

My point in all this is that a child whose first fourteen months had been some sort of hell, probably one of the lower levels, seemed not to be handicapped at all by that experience. The love of his adoptive parents seemed to have erased all the horrors of the foundling home, and whatever had preceded his placement there. We didn't know how Ricardo had lost his eyes, but certainly, a succession of horrors had befallen that little boy.

Mr. and Mrs. Rivera had seen to it that Ricardo had glass eyes, and Marta was adept at helping him to care for those eyes. When an Orientation and Mobility Trainer from Central Office came to work with Ricardo on walking with a white cane, she said at the end of their first day together that he had done very well, and added, "Of course he could do well because he's partially sighted." Carolina took special delight in telling the Trainer that Ricardo had no eyes – his bright blue prosthetic eyes weren't seeing anything at all.

I think it was from Ricardo that I learned that we humans seem to be born with our personalities. I'm convinced that little boy was a delightful person with a loving heart because that's who he was born to be. Certainly, the love he received from his adoptive parents was a remarkable influence. But we can't really pretend the first months of his life were nurturing or loving, and someone may well have been horribly cruel to deprive a baby of his eyes. It's also possible that he was born with functional eye sockets but no eyes, of course, but still, there were those 14 months of a terribly inadequate institutional life.

I saw Ricardo years later, when I was working on another degree. He was an incoming freshman at the University of New Mexico. We had a happy reunion, and I got to see our little blind boy grown tall and handsome, coping well with navigating the UNM campus and still doing exceptionally well academically and socially. Clearly, his first fourteen months had not determined the rest of his life. Ricardo had been born with a keen mind, a loving heart, and a winning personality, and they seemed to be indelible.

So in the midst of a scary political season, I'm thinking that we come into the world with our personalities. We are loving and kind because that's the way we were wired long before we were born, or we lack kindness and compassion because somehow that part was left out of our genetic endowment, just as eyes could have been left out of Ricardo's developing self. I can't design a way to win over the angry members of humankind. As I've been told over and over, I'm not that powerful. I must remember the admonition to "Be not afraid." And I must hope that kindness will prevail.

Sherry K.

UU humor:

Three children were talking about their religions.

"I'm a Catholic," said one, "and our symbol is the cross."

"I'm Jewish," said the second, "and our symbol is the Star of David."

The third child said, "I'm a Unitarian Universalist and our symbol is a candle in a cocktail glass!"

A Unitarian is just a Quaker with Attention Deficit Disorder.

2020 Election:

Gregg and surrounding counties are looking for election poll workers for the November general election. This could be a way for you to contribute some time and energy.