

This is the season of stories, legends, and myths. For a story to be a story, it should be heard. If a story is heard by enough people and hangs around long enough it becomes a legend. Old legends become myths. Here's an example of a myth told to me by Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Susanne Nazian. It's called, "The Ancient Goddess Barbie: Historical Views from the year 5000."

We are proud to announce that archaeologists have made a major discovery explaining religious practice in the 1990's, over three thousand years ago! These discoveries help us better understand the myths and traditions which have been handed down over the years, and still survive today within the popular cult of the Goddess Barbie. This tradition is one of the fastest growing groups of modern-day Goddess worship. Archaeologists have discovered that Barbie worship dates back to ancient times. Figures of the Goddess Barbie have been unearthed, preserved in nearly pristine state. It seems that ancient worshippers made their images of Barbie in a material known as plastic. It was known at the time that plastic did not decay to the elements over time and was nearly everlasting! Because of this, it is obvious to our research team that those items made of plastic were held in the highest regard by the ancient culture of the 1990's. They surely wanted to preserve these items for eternity!

Research shows that ancient priestesses of Barbie were initiated at a very young age. The initiation ceremony involved a complex litany which lasted several weeks, usually prior to the Winter Solstice. Young daughters would chant at length to their parents, repeating over and over the praises of Barbie, stating their desires for the Goddess to enter their lives. While these chants varied from priestess to priestess, the words "I Want" are common to many of the evocations. Later, after initiation, additional chants focused on a wide variety of magical tools and altar accessories used by the Goddess Barbie in Her temple.

Images of the Goddess Barbie show Her in many aspects. For example, She was portrayed as a Solar Deity in Her Malibu Barbie aspect. This explains the modern-day custom of Barbie worshippers donning colored glasses and anointing themselves with special protective lotions to celebrate the Summer Solstice! It is known that ancient religions sometimes masked their Deities within the Saints of ancient Catholicism. Researchers are certain this explains the name used for an ancient west coast village known as Santa Barbara, perhaps a Mecca for Barbie worshippers. Each Barbie figurine also held strange numerical markings, \$24.99. This explains the current custom where Barbie worshippers tattoo themselves with this number! It was obviously the number most sacred to the Goddess. The \$ symbol was used in many ways by the ancient culture, and was considered both a scourge and salute to religious society.

It was also discovered that ancient Barbie had a consort known as Ken. Close examination of plastic Ken figures explain why today's modern Barbie worshippers allow only eunuchs to participate in religious rites, with no other males allowed. Since many fewer Ken figures were found, we can assume that the ancient Barbie worshippers were a matriarchal tradition.

Our team of linguistic researchers have determined through study of the ancient language that Ken was renowned in many parts of the world. This explains the origins of ancient places like Kenya, Kentucky and even the variation of Canada. An in-depth study of the Ken

mythos also links Him to the ancient clan known as Kennedy. Note the amazing facial similarities! Stories surrounding this ancient Kennedy cult seem to be a unique mixture of the "slain God" stories (similar to the Egyptian Osiris) and the revelry of the Roman Bacchus. This seems to fit all three aspects of the Triple Kennedy myth.

Other research shows a related figure, an ancient warrior God known as GI Joe. Since GI Joe had no known female consort, and was also a eunuch, it is obvious that both Joe and Ken competed for the Goddess Barbie. One theory links this to the surviving Oak King/Holly King myths of earlier times.

Now THERE's a myth!

Back in the present, there's a song that appears every year around this time made popular by Bing Crosby called "Do You Hear What I Hear?". It tells the Christmas story of the star, the shepherd, and the kings by asking Do You See What I See – a star, dancing in the night with a tail as big as a kite. Do You Hear What I Hear – a song, high above the trees, with a voice as big as the sea? Do You Know What I Know – a Child shivers in the cold, let us bring him silver and gold?

Now a literal interpretation of this song would stretch even non-Unitarian Universalists, but there is an element of plausibility uncovered in each of these verses. Kites were part of middle Eastern culture two thousand years ago, and presumably they had tails. Big ones. And the Sea of Galilee would look quite large to these land-locked people. A child born anytime would become cold and shiver if not properly covered.. I'm not convinced that silver and gold would be a very effective blanket, but can see that they would provide the means to ensure warmth and comfort.

But none of this unpacking of the song matters to any but the most literal-minded folks. It is understood to be a story. And stories are told with imagery to which the hearers can relate. Storytelling has been around since before recorded history. There's a reason for that. Stories provide structure—ways to help people understand new ideas, interpret the meaning of difficult concepts and visualize possibilities they never knew existed. They also serve to connect humans through shared experiences, asking the question, "do you hear/see the same thing I hear/see"? If you do, we are brought closer together through our shared and commonly interpreted experience.

The boy in our Word for All Ages told his story pretty clearly– he wanted a hot dog and fries. But it wasn't HIS story until someone – the waitress, bless her heart – heard him. Our stories become real – or at least real-er – when other people hear them.

We tell our stories through a variety of medium. Beginning with the earliest people we spoke our experiences and later added the accompaniment of chant and drum. Later we added visual expression, manifested by the 40,000 year old rock art in New South Wales, Australia and Chauvet, France We have told our stories through music, art, dance, the written word, and film, and now reach listeners around the globe instantaneously.

One of the recurring themes of human stories is the contrast between dark and light. This is the season -- the beginning of the winter solstice on December 22 – that we hear these stories. From our pagan sources we celebrate Yule, which may have derived from the Norse word *jól*, referring to the pre-Christian winter solstice festival. Yule is also known as *Alban Arthan* and was one of the "Lesser Sabbats" of the Wiccan year in a time when ancient believers celebrated the rebirth of the Sun God and days with more light. On December 25 Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus whom they believe represents God and the hope of the world. Jews acknowledge

Hannukah, the Festival of Lights, beginning this year on December 20, which commemorates the lighting miracle when one night's worth of oil lit candles for eight days during the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt of the 2nd century. All of these traditions speak of moving from a time of darkness – a time when hope was at its lowest ebb – to a time of light.

Today we are going to hear stories of this movement from darkness to light from our own UUFMC community. Hal Sands will tell us of a gradual change of heart. Dot Franklin expresses re-imagining and re-orientation through poetry. Through music Ruth Prentice and Bob Dauhn share Ruth's story of unlikely transformation. Between each of these stories we will share a brief silence, so we can really hear the message behind the words. We'll begin with Hal Sand's narrative.

My journey from darkness to light consisted of changing from a bigot to a believing Unitarian. I became a Unitarian in 1962, but it was in name only. I was, according to the dictionary, a bigot. I had no tolerance for the religious beliefs of other people, especially Christianity.

I was very comfortable as an "in name only Unitarian". My friends in the Fellowship were just like me. They were bigots, just like me. Some of you may have heard my first talk here in which I mercilessly excoriated the most sacred Christian beliefs. It was me, the bigot, giving vent to my unharnessed bigotry. I would not approve of that talk today. I suppose that no one likes to be ignorant, i.e., uninformed, and I am no exception. I had read parts of the Jewish bible, The Torah and parts of The Talmud, but I had never read the Christian section of the New Testament. In this day and age, where religion plays an important role in individual lives, in national politics, and in international affairs, it is pretty ignorant not to know about all of the major religions. As a start I decided to study the Christian part of the Bible.

It didn't work out. Every time I tried to read the bible the begats bored me and but me to sleep or some of the statements made me so angry that I would slam the book down and walk away. One day Doris said to me, "Why don't you join a bible study group? It might help." I told her that there was no way I would ever join a bible study group. So, after I joined this conservative Christian bible study group, an important thing happened. I was forced to do some realty testing. All my life I had believed that these Christians were really bad people. If there is a devil, they must be the devil's helpers. They preach love and practice hate.

Never have I been so wrong. I discovered that these are really very genuine and caring people. I don't believe like they do, but I discovered that we could still become good friends and really care about each other. My life long bigotry was beginning to crumble. I was even beginning to see merit in the teachings of Jesus. The ideas of turning the other cheek, the Golden rule, and his inclusiveness. He treated even the lowliest with respect and dignity. To me, these ideas have become the focal point for celebrating Christmas.

I didn't have an epiphany, nor a peak experience, nor a revelation, nor a gestalt moment of insight. It was a slow process of thinking things out. I began to think that one should never attack another person's religion. It serves no useful purpose and there is a good chance that the effect will be to strengthen their belief anyway. I began to realize that it is not religion that causes us to fight and kill each other. It is our tendency to divide people into us and them. We have a mistaken belief that we all need to be alike,

and that if other people are different than we are, we need to change them.

(Silence) Poets tell stories through imagery, metaphors, and rhymes. This morning Dot Franklin will read her poem describing a disappointment that transformed the way the holidays are celebrated.

FIRST CHRISTMAS WITHOUT THE CHILDREN

*“Our children won’t be with us”
My husband made a fuss
I could hear him on the phone
Saw his face like a stone
“There won’t be much to cheer”
He choked, “grim around here”*

*Our computer-bound girls had worked hard this year
With little time off and weary I fear
They planned a trip with friends to ski
Out of New York - barely time to flee*

*Now was the moment for a creative plan
I spoke to my husband “man to man”
“Let’s visit the weekend before they leave
We’ll pretend then it’s Christmas Eve
It’ll be an adult celebration,
Hors d’oeuvres, tree trimming, decoration*

*On the real Christmas Eve after church
We’ll visit hospital children and perch
With the “Night before Christmas”, our worn-out book
“Let’s do it” I begged, “by hook or by crook”*

*He agreed and on Christmas day he actually listened
When I asked him, “Lets help at our local soup kitchen?”
Our prodigal children called Christmas night
Returning home from their fun and flight
They asked my “sainted” husband about his holiday
“It was the best Christmas ever,” I heard him say*

(Silence) Music, it is said, is the only form of expression that touches the core of humanity. For eons it has been used to evoke and express emotions. Bob Dauhn and Ruth Prentice are going to play the song, “I’ll Be Home For Christmas”, which was written during World War Two. But first, I’d like read to you something Ruth wrote about her family's Christmas in 1943, the year that song was written. It's entitled, OUR CHRISTMAS TREE.

My dad was a railroad engineer, and was working 12 to 18 hours a day moving freight for the

war effort. He would often just about get home, and they'd call him back to work again, so we didn't get to see him much. My two older brothers were in the Navy, but we were delighted when Harve unexpectedly got home on leave a few days before Christmas. Since Mom didn't drive, she asked him to take her around, looking for a Christmas tree. They scoured the area, but trees were in short supply everywhere that year. Mom was about to buy one of the straggley ones they found, but Harve talked her out of it, promising to take her looking again the next day. So they went home.

But that night, Harve was suddenly called back to base, and by the next day he had shipped out. We younger kids were disappointed to have no tree, and for the next 65 years we teased Harve about dropping the ball. But the truth is, Mom's ingenuity saved the day. She put colored lights and tinsel on a floor lamp, and at night, through the window, it was really quite beautiful.

(Silence) This is the season of stories, legends, and myths. There are stories here in our UUFMC community that have yet to be told – stories that are too private, too raw, too painful to be told in this public venue. We honor our storytellers by listening. By listening carefully. And by care-filled listening we sometimes hear what they hear. When that happens, we are brought closer in our common humanity as we move together in our journey from the darkness into the light. May it be so. Enshallah. Shalom. Amen.