

STORY FOR ALL AGES

Brave Love

BY PAM KENNEDY



Photo courtesy of the author

When I was in eighth grade, a long way back, a new student came to our school. His name was Greg. He had been born without arms and wore the old-fashioned prostheses with metal hooks for hands and fingers. Kids made fun of him mercilessly.

One girl was not mean to Greg. She would speak with him at lunchtime. Their classes didn't cross; Greg had been placed in a special education class because of his physical disability. It couldn't be said that he and that girl were friends. They were acquaintances, with a cordial relationship.

Greg often took papers back and forth from the school office. One day, he dropped a paper in the school corridor. That girl happened to be going to class and saw a big ring of kids in the hall, like the kind that would form when there were fistfights. Nobody was fighting, however. The kids were watching Greg and making fun of him. He couldn't slip his hook under the paper to grab it. He was kneeling on the floor and trying to pick it up with his teeth.

The girl was outraged. Pushing

through the students, she picked up the paper and gave it to Greg, to catcalls and disgusted groans. Pushing through the crowd raised a lot of adrenaline for her and, as I remember, her face turned red. Some comments were made to her in the hallways that day, the result of her spoiling others' fun. But she was glad for what she had done, no matter the social consequences.

That girl was me. I don't share my story for any congratulations or honor. I share it because it came to mind when I was preparing to talk with children at my Unitarian Universalist congregation about "Brave Love." I sat with it for a bit and had a "wow" moment. Had I really done that?

I remember having a surge of anger that brought on this act, where I could part a gang of kids and storm toward

continued on the next page

Stop! In the
Name of Love

The Families pages
are adapted from
Tapestry of Faith
lifespan faith
development
programs.

[www.uua.org/
tapestryoffaith](http://www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith)

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Greg. I was angry because Greg was always ostracized and bullied. I'm sure when I was running in there my mind was also running, a mile a minute, thinking what the repercussions would be. Yet I went on.

Sometimes brave acts are planned; sometimes people just follow their instinct for what is fair and right, without second-guessing. Righteous anger can be like fuel that helps us stand up for love, justice, and peace.

If you have ever approached someone who said, "What a retard," or "That's so gay," and told them their words were offensive, you have exhibited Brave Love. If you sit at lunch with a schoolmate who is bullied or shunned because their clothing is old, they immigrated to the United States, or they belong to a different race or ethnicity than most of the other kids, then you are showing Brave Love.

Turning our anger at injustice into acts of love is what UUs do.



The "Love" sculpture by artist Robert Indiana was placed in Philadelphia's "Love Park" in 1976.

EXPLORING TOGETHER

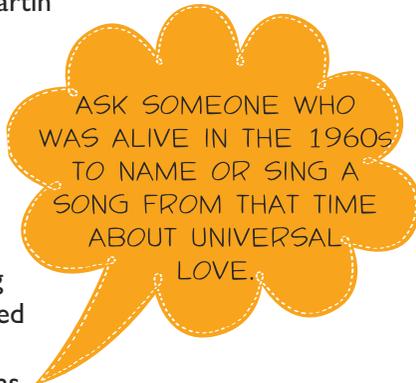
What's love got to do with religion? For UUs, a lot—if you mean “universal love,” or agape, which is different from romantic love. It is a love that includes everyone. If everybody in the world acted kindly and caringly toward everybody, wouldn't we do more right for each other and less wrong to each other? As UUs, we want to show universal love because we value every person and we believe that everyone deserves to be loved. When we notice injustice, we fight against it with love.

Universal Love and Justice for All

In the 1960s, the United States fought a war in faraway Vietnam. Many Americans, however, opposed the war. A popular anti-war slogan was “Make love, not war!” Many others talked about love as they protested racism and violence toward African Americans. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights leader, said, “Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

The kind of love Dr. King meant was universal love. It was everywhere in 1960s popular culture, and many understood its connection with peace and justice. Your parents or grandparents may remember these song lyrics: “What the world needs now, is love, sweet love. That's the only thing that there's just too little of,” or these, “All you need is love.”

In 1964, artist Robert Indiana created a Christmas card with a simple message: one word, "LOVE." His image became popular. It appeared in many different forms, including a postage stamp, T-shirts, and large, public sculptures in at least sixteen cities.



ASK SOMEONE WHO WAS ALIVE IN THE 1960s TO NAME OR SING A SONG FROM THAT TIME ABOUT UNIVERSAL LOVE.

Do you believe artwork can help spread universal love and bring more justice?

Create a work of art to show how love can help in an unjust situation.

Write a song or make up a dance about universal love. Don't be shy! Be a justice-maker. Display or perform your universal-love art for others.

Draw or sculpt the letters of the word "LOVE" as Robert Indiana did. Arrange the letters in a unique way.

Paint an image that expresses the idea of universal love to inspire others.

Brave Love Blessing

Keep alert;
Stand firm in your faith;
Be courageous and strong;
Let all that you do be done in love.



—from the Tapestry of Faith program Windows and Mirrors

Taking Risks for Love



Juliette Hampton Morgan grew up in the elite social class of Montgomery, Alabama, with opportunities that in her time and place were “Whites Only” by custom and by law. After college, Juliette went to work at a bookstore. She rode the Montgomery city bus. Day after day, she witnessed unfairness toward black

passengers who were sent back outside to use the rear door and seats after boarding the bus to pay their fare like everyone else.

Juliette was a person of love, not hate. When one bus driver drove away, leaving behind a black woman who had paid, that did it. Juliette pulled the emergency “stop” cord on the bus to protest, while other white passengers sat silent, horrified by her action. She wrote letters to the local newspaper, too, and was immediately fired from her job.

She wrote that Alabama showed “very bad behavior in the eyes of the nation and the world.” She said white people in the state lacked “good will, and most especially . . . moral courage to express it.” White friends, colleagues, and even family members shunned her. Strangers sent hate mail and made threatening phone calls.

Why did Juliette Morgan speak out?

Was she brave? Do you think she weighed the risk before she took action?

Have you ever been out and about in your community and seen someone treating someone else unfairly, perhaps in a store, a restaurant, or a public park? How is witnessing an injustice in person different from seeing a video or reading about it?

What does it take to stand up, speak out, and show Brave Love, on the spot?

TO DO: DATE/TIME: PRIORITY:

TITLE: Love Every Day

DETAILS: How much more love do you imagine the world can hold? Experiment by making Brave Love a daily practice. The UUA's Standing on the Side of Love website offers dozens of ideas, like:

- Choose someone who could use a friendly smile. Commit to saying “hello” to that person every day for a week.
- Think of someone you know who works to make the world a better place. Make them a thank-you card.
- Talk to someone with whom you ordinarily might not talk. Ask them to tell you something about their life. Thank them for sharing their experiences with you. Listening to someone's story is a way to show love.

How to Stop a Bully with Love

If you're a bystander when bullying is going on, you are actually showing support for the bully. Be ready to show Brave Love, instead. What can you do, without putting yourself in danger?

- Walk away.** Refuse to be the audience for a bully.
- Interrupt the situation.** Help the person being bullied to get away, or create a distraction to focus everyone's attention on something else.
- Tell a trusted adult about the situation.** The more adults you involve, the better.
- Be a friend to the person being bullied.** Just be nice to them at another time. That is a loving way to let the person know they are not alone.

These tips come from stopbullying.gov.

BULLYING



Return to the Source: Our Principles

BY NORA RASMAN

Young children may not know what “theology” means, but if they have been actively part of Unitarian Universalism the development of their faith is well underway. I know this from my own experience as a UU child. Growing up, I understood that our Seven Principles acted as a guiding document for the ways UUs were expected to live in the world.

Our Principles seemed helpful, even obvious, to me—“Be nice to others” (our Second Principle), “Voting is good” (our Fifth). I was particularly proud of my ability to uphold our Seventh Principle. To me, “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part” meant that we needed to recycle.

Over time, I came to realize that “recycling” wasn’t all we were talking about. To really live and grow into my UU Principles, I had to act from a place of love, equity, and humility not just now and then, but at all times. Today, the

Seventh Principle means much more to me than “recycle.” It means that our present and future depend on shifting our relationship to consumption and mass globalization. The Seventh Principle reminds me that we must talk about the ways capitalism and white supremacy create trauma for many people and communities around the world.

Now, twenty years later, I understand the Principles with more context and nuance, and with more awareness of society’s power dynamics. At any age, we have infinite opportunities to expand how we understand our Principles and how we apply them toward living our best selves every day.

To love, parent, and grow effectively, let us return to our Principles. I think you can trust that the children you are raising now will, as youth and young adults, have the audacity and fortitude to discover more and more complex ways to live our Principles. I invite you to sit with them on their journey.



■ **What action have you taken lately to explicitly affirm one of our UU Principles?**

■ **How can you help a child recognize the connection between active deeds and faith Principles?**

Nora Rasman, the UUA’s Standing on the Side of Love Campaign coordinator, has also worked with organizations seeking domestic and international human rights. Originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Nora was involved with UU youth leadership development, the national Groundwork Anti-Racism Trainers Collective, and the YRUU (Young Religious UUs) Steering Committee.

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FAMILIES:

WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

Provided by the Faith Development Office of the Unitarian Universalist Association

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FIND OUT MORE

■ The UUA’s Standing on the Side of Love campaign celebrated its fifth anniversary at the 2014 UUA General Assembly in Providence, Rhode Island.

Visit standingonthesideoflove.org for the latest events, activities, information, and stories about how UUs live our Principles and ideas for how you can support racial, social, and economic justice.

Correction: In the Fall 2014 issue, we incorrectly said that plastic is made from the mineral silica. Silica is used to make glass.

