

## Josephine Gould Lecture

Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the St. Lawrence District, Unitarian Universalist Association  
Binghamton, NY, Friday, April 27, 2001

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### **CRY, LAMENT, UNDERSTAND AND CELEBRATE**

One day a mouse was walking on the banks of a river that ran through the jungle. He saw a Hippopotamus in the water and shouted to the Hippopotamus,

"Hey you, come out of the water onto this bank, NOW". The hippopotamus thought, 'this is weird', but lumbered onto the bank as requested. The mouse looked at him then said, "OK, you can get back in the water".

The mouse continued walking along the bank until he came upon a lion having a little dip in the river. The mouse shouted across to the lion, "Hey you , get up here, on this bank NOW!". The lion was a little concerned about this 'overly autocratic' mouse giving him orders but he was even more curious, so he complied and climbed up onto the bank. The mouse gave him the once-over then said, "OK, you can get back into the water now". The lion shrugged and returned to the river.

The mouse continued his trip along the banks of the river until he came across an elephant having a good old soak. The mouse shouted to the elephant. "Hey you, Mr. Elephant, UP HERE on this bank now!". The elephant was very polite and kind and didn't like to point out that he had no idea who or what was yelling at him, so he laboriously climbed up the bank and stood there. The elephant was then told by the mouse to return to the water.

The elephant however was also annoyed at having his soak disturbed so he said to the mouse, "What is going on? What is it you want? I've just seen you call the hippopotamus, then the lion and now me out of the water, why are you doing this?"

The mouse replied, " When I find the son of a gun who stole my swimming trunks, he is in real trouble!"

Now believe it or not, this story *does* have something to do with my topic - but you'll have to wait a while for the connection...

In ministry we are told to speak the truth in love. Even when the truth is unpalatable we are to do so. Ministers (in reality, all who minister) are called to be, among many other things, what I call "naked Emperor spotters." Many of us have learned this skill well from Hans Christian Andersen...

All of us ministers in this room - that is, all who approach life with courage and compassion and try our best to interact with loving kindness - all of us in this room, are aware of the tension that has been produced by the recent CUC-UUA (Canadian Unitarian Council-Unitarian Universalist Association) negotiations. What has been uppermost in the minds of many Unitarian Universalists...and Unitarians and Universalists...in this cross-border district...has been the future of the district, plus the quality of the decision making, or the methodology of the decision making that the negotiations have followed. Surely this is a naked emperor. And it is good to acknowledge this, because whatever decisions are taken around these negotiations it will impact on our district and on our relationships; perhaps even our faith.

During my comments this evening I ask you to think about how we will choose to let the imminent UUA-CUC decisions affect our ministering to each other. I want to know how we will get past the past and adapt with grace. And just whose version of the past are we getting past anyway? I hope, it is my prayer, that somehow, there will be a place on the other side of all this tension where respect and affection are by far the dominant feelings we all share.

Because of the sensitivity of this topic, and because I assume I share with you the anxiety of change -any change- as well the potential for grief, it is important that I let you know who I really am - some of it you know, some of it may surprise you a bit.

When I first decided to become a minister I made a decision I have never regretted, although it has probably cost me somewhat financially and perhaps to a lesser extent in professional reputation. I decided that I wanted to be a Canadian minister, serving Canadian congregations because then I would be serving from the center of my being, the core of what I understood to be essential in life; I would be serving out of the ethos in which I had been born.

I had lived in several other countries before I entered the ministry - one for one year and another for two - and I decided that I would be very happy living and working in the country of my birth, honoured (and relieved, to be honest!)

to be living there and not in either of the other two. (neither of which was the United States, I hasten to add!) When I began ministerial training about 22 years ago I was often asked if I was going to minister down here and I would always go into my song and dance about my country and my ethos. My sense was that at this time (the late seventies) Canada was seen by most ministers (Canadian and American) as an acceptable training place...but not for a serious lifetime placement. The comments ranged from: you probably won't make as good a salary ... to ... it's not really *that* different ...to... there's not much choice up here (or there). All true, thoughtful comments concerned for my physical welfare but perhaps not as aware of my rootedness and passion for my country.

As an Intern or a fully fellowshipped UU minister I have served congregations for longer or shorter periods in Kelowna and Vancouver, British Columbia; in Edmonton, Alberta; in Thunder Bay and now in London, Ontario. I have served on the Western Canada District Board and the Canadian Unitarian Council. I experienced it all and I found it to be good, very good. I felt proud, very proud.

As a matter of fact, I have done what several other Canadians have done and have put together my own - what is known in Canada as a "rant. Those of you who drink Molson's beer, or listen to commercials, may have heard the original. Although hey, you can relax, because mine is most definitely NOT about comparing my self positively to an American, but rather about lifting up and celebrating my Canadian Unitarian Universalism. In fact it probably ought to be called a "praise" rather than a "rant" - tell me what you think. Here it is...the music that accompanies it helps to pump up the speaker, at least it does this speaker!

"Look at us here - we are Canadian Unitarian Universalists.  
Our religion is smaller in size than many others  
but it is not smaller in heart and soul or principles.  
We do not require a creed or a dogma to hold fast our members;  
they stay out of a radical commitment to individual freedom of belief  
- each member taking responsibility for their own religious values -  
and more than that - to accept the differences among us.  
We may call ourselves a Unitarian or a Universalist  
a Unitarian Universalist or a Universalist Unitarian  
but we are *not* United, Unity or Unification Church members.  
We are as old as the ancient religions

and yet as new as today's possibilities  
We are rooted in the Reformation and the Enlightenment  
and will mind wrestle with anyone about  
false fears and false assumptions of our present world.

We were first to openly celebrate services of  
holy unions for gays and lesbians and,  
in the world of religious institutions, first  
to work on making our sacred and secular language inclusive.  
Our belief in the interdependence of all creation  
does not make us king or queen of any mountain  
but rather students learning to work with other species  
on this beautiful planet that is home to us all.

We believe in the ultimate goodness of humans  
Some of us believe in God and some don't  
We all put our trust in our conscience-  
in the small still voice heard in each one of us.  
We don't have all of the answers,  
but we do have most of the questions  
and if you ask nicely we'll share them.

In this vast Canadian landscape we are like pygmies  
And yet we are feisty, idiosyncratic and argumentative.  
We are proud to be called heretics - to be those willing to choose-  
and yield our integrity to no one.  
We are the sand in your shoes  
We are the burr under your saddle  
We are the flea in your ear  
We are the pepper in your sauce.

We are proud also to be called blasphemous  
if it means we are being true to our religious principles.  
We are at home in our religion - which has no moat or drawbridge.  
It excludes only those who do not wish equality, democracy  
or the knowledge that change is inevitable.  
We have worth and dignity and compassion and determination--  
often we stand amazed at what we do not know  
and awestruck at the potency of love at work in the world.

The spirit of life never forsakes us, regardless of our inattention.  
We prefer hope to despair regardless of evidence to the contrary.  
We are a moving river *and* the Niagara Falls.  
We are the Canadian Unitarian Universalists!"

(all set to the music of Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" aka "Land of Hope and Glory...from the CD *Symphonic Spectaculars* by the Toronto Symphony))

Thus endeth the first and only lesson in Jane's Canadian pride. And I believe that "praise" has given me a good segue into my next section; Jane's ardent Unitarian Universalist continentalism.

I have been an enthusiastic supporter of our continental religious movement and organisation almost as long as I have been a proud Canadian UU. In the 1970s I was one of three people who created an organization called "Prairie Galaxy" - its purpose was to bring isolated prairie UUs from North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northern Ontario together. For three years each summer we met in each other's countries and learned more about each other's kind of UUism. I found the prairie similarities outweighed the national differences.

I spent three years at the PNWD (Pacific NorthWest District) Leadership School when it first began - not because I was a slow learner but because originally it had three levels (beginner, intermediate, senior)... Here the Canadians and Americans interacted freely and both learned from each other. I was so impressed by this creative model that, as CUC extension person, I arranged the first meeting of representatives from the CUC and the SLD (St. Lawrence District) from which EAGLES (Eastern Great Lakes) Leadership School was born. I was excited knowing that I was part of a continental organisation, perhaps initially because of the isolation I felt in Winnipeg, Manitoba - but also because of the incredible variety it brought to my life. While on the CUC Board I was also liaison to the PNWD's Extension Committee while we negotiated the final arrangements around a person called "The International Minister-at-Large" (Robert Latham) who served congregations in the Canada and the United States; in PNWD and WCD (Western Canada District) - one year at a time to give congregations a fresh 'jump-start.'

Some of you will know that I just finished four years as a Trustee on this SLD Board - an experience that helped to consolidate my enjoyment of working

cross-border. Whenever I have been asked to serve on a UUA Committee, I have said yes. I have had the privilege of serving on several UUA Committees and a task force: The Women and Religion Committee, the Sexism Audit Task Force; and twice on the Nominating Committee (a Committee I presently serve). I find General Assemblies to be the most exiting spiritual and religious smorgasbord imaginable! I can't imagine not being part of it anymore.

This has been a very long introduction - yet it tells you who I am: both a proud Canadian and an ardent and active continentalist. No matter what decision is made in Montreal by the Canadians or I guess, at the UUA Board meeting, I will lose something very important. I guess that's what happens to fence sitters. And yet I am unapologetic about fence sitting because it is a good place to stay until I have to come down on one side or another. In fact it feels as broad and stable as the great wall of China. 'Both/and' for me is a better place to move from, than either/or. I wonder if any of you feel this way? Certainly each of you will have your own history and perspective on what would make the most sense.

And now let me explain the title of my talk; "Cry, Lament, Understand and Celebrate." As I have thought about the wording of the negotiations and also the voluminous e-mails on the three chat lines I am on (one professional, one CUC and one SLD) I have found the most unexpected images and phrases coming to me quite unsolicited. I am sure those of you who have also been interacting on one or more of the sites set up to allow dialogue among us will have found specific images and phrases inhabiting your inner space as well.

To my exasperated surprise I found the titles of three books kept forcing their way into my consciousness.

The first was *Cry the Beloved Country*. What could this possibly have to do with a problem between UUs in Canada and the United States? It is a book written about South Africa by a South African, Alan Paton. A black man kills a white man and ultimately the father of the murdered man ends up helping the family of the murderer. But the unconscious mind is a marvelous thing and usually knows what it is doing. *Cry the Beloved Country* at a deeper level is a story about a country where stereotypes abound; where inequality is taken for granted; where both races have a love of the land.

"Cry, the beloved country, (says Alan Paton) for the unborn child that is the

inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers, nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds of his land are singing, nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley. For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much."

Ahhh - these words begin to explain why this title has intruded on my thoughts. Although the struggle before us is not one of black against white - there are suggestions and opinions of quite different perceptions of privilege and responsibility coming from representatives of our two countries. And of course, one of the difficulties about what is occurring is that these perceptions are often portrayed as either black or white. I for one do not want to cause future generations to feel a lack of hope or to hold back on love, laughter, joy - or to believe that giving one's all is unacceptable. Dangerous, yes, but expected in our faith all the same.

I want to know that what I, actually what all of us decide - has been done with integrity, respect and a belief that as one of Alan Paton's character's said:

"...I shall try to do what is right, and to speak what is true.... I am moved by something that is not my own, that moves me to do what is right, at whatever cost it may be."

The second title that kept coming to mind was *Lament for a Nation* by an outstanding Canadian philosopher and theologian, George Grant.

This was an even stranger unconscious nudge than *Cry the Beloved Country*! *Lament for a Nation* is a small, angry book written in 1963 about what the author saw as the defeat, the end of Canadian nationalism and the triumph of North American (read american) continentalism. What is strange about it is that George Grant is (was) a capital C Conservative... not my own political views at all...and I'm somewhat embarrassed to admit...I hadn't even read the book! (I have, now..) But I knew all about it - most thinking Canadians of my generation knew about it. It was a book lamenting the loss of tradition, of Canadian autonomy, Liberal political policies having led, in his view, to "the impossibility of an alternative to the American republic being built on the northern half of this continent." Americans lived, in Grant's words, in "the most dynamic nation on earth...the guardian of Western values"...and also one that was an aggressive, technologically advanced, individualistic capitalistic empire that greedily acquired branch plant satellites - Canada

being one of them. George Grant did not mince words. And he held Canada's feet to the fire as well, saying that we have "flaccid will" and are "like the child of some stockbroker who can enjoy the fruits of his father's endeavours by living the swinging life, but likes to exclude from his mind where the money comes from. Like most other human beings, Canadians want it both ways..."

I think I am beginning to understand why this title pushed its way into the Gould lecture. I am lamenting, but my Canada is not dead as a nation, and I also don't believe continentalism is a bad thing. I do want it both ways - but not with broken hearts or distrust or a sense of this vibrant, hopeful faith of ours being fractured. Although if we are to be really faithful, then we need to balance institutional needs, national needs, and continental needs; swallow hard and know that we can't know what the future will hold. As George Grant puts it:

"The kindest of all God's dispensations is that individuals cannot predict the future in detail."

The word "understand" in the title came from my reading of a book entitled (I think) *Please Understand Me...* a book about Myers Briggs personality typology. This typology is just one way among dozens of ways that we humans have developed to try to figure out how to get along with ourselves and each other. As I have been reading all the e-mail messages about the negotiations I have found myself trying to understand what might be behind this remark or that question. Because surely that's one of the important matters, is it not? Why has this call for change come about at this time and is it change that is worth taking...and how will we ever know for sure? The title simply reminded me of our ongoing and desperate human need to make the thoughts of our minds, the beating of our hearts and the whispers of our spirits known to each other.

You'll probably be relieved to know that by the time I got to the final word of my title, I was receiving no more unsolicited book titles. And that was something to "celebrate!" And celebrate is something, ultimately, we all must do.

Something else I mentioned in the description about this talk was that I was interested in elephant and mouse stories or myths. This is because (at least

for some in Canada) this seems to be a metaphor that helps to explain the attitude of Canadians towards Americans...and perhaps of Americans towards Canadians too! It fairly accurately describes the relative size of one to the other and the difficulty of communicating from such different vantage points. One excellent if painful result of these negotiations is that both Canadians and Americans have been forced to learn a lot more about each other at a much deeper level.

Now when I began to research for Elephant and Mouse stories, I found that there were very few. There were quite a few Mouse and Elephant jokes - I opened my lecture with one of the better ones - many of the others were unrepeatable, tasteless or boring and there were almost no myths, fables or stories. I did learn that it is a myth that elephants are afraid of mice...because mice are so small that they are not even in the elephant's frame of reference. But the one fable I did find has an interesting twist that may be illustrative to my exploration of meaning amidst the negotiations. It is an ancient Turkish story.

*The Mouse and the Elephant* by Barbara K. Walker and Naki Tezel (a folk tale from Turkey) It is a story about a proud mouse who thinks he is the master of the forest..stamps his feet and then puts his ear to the ground to see if the earth trembles - It is suggested to him that the elephant may be annoyed at the mouse for declaring he is master of the forest. So the mouse, who has no idea of what is an elephant, decides to go and confront the elephant. On his journey he meets various animals and proclaims his masterdom. As he is telling the lizard (and stamping his foot), it chanced at that moment there was a great clap of thunder and the mouse is sure it was caused by his foot stamping. And then he tells a cockroach about his exalted position and the cockroach is not impressed, but as the mouse glares angrily at him it happens that there is a flash of lightning at the same time...the mouse is sure he has caused it...Finally the mouse comes to something that looked as big as a mountain. It had four legs as big as tree trunks, it had two tails, one in front, one in the back and two big ears. "Hey you," he says, are you an elephant..."Look at me, I am master of this forest. What do you think of that?" All the elephant could see was a tiny speck on the forest floor. the elephant aimed his trunk at the speck on the ground and gushed forth all the water he had sucked up for his bath. Whoosh! The mouse was thrown heels over ears down the path with the sudden flood. He lay there for a moment, half-dead from shock and next-door to drowned, besides.

When he came to his senses again, the elephant was gone. "What a storm that was!" exclaimed the mouse. "And it's a lucky thing for the elephant. If the sky hadn't opened up with a cloudburst, I would have broken that elephant to bits.

And so he returned to his home fully believing that he was master of the forest, telling of the amazing feats he performed - and that the elephant had drowned in the cloudburst. And unless an elephant has come by to disprove his story, he is telling it still.

Well, what's the point?

Something both stories share is the ridiculousness of the mouse's behaviour and the indifference or puzzlement of the elephant's. The first story is fun and silly, although it does remind us of how obsessive we can become when we feel that something has been taken from us...or is about to be taken. And sometimes we look in all the wrong places for what we have lost. The elephant does ask significant questions however: *What is it you want? What is going on?*

In the second story the mouse's beliefs are built upon his experiences (you know, just like we Unitarian Universalists like to do..) but the mouse doesn't check out other factors that need to be taken into consideration. How does one know when one has given a wrong interpretation to experiences, to impressions, to events?

Well, what is going on?

One answer is very simple - change.

I found when I started writing this section that a Greek chorus style of words kept cropping up "Change happens, change hurts, change helps, change transforms."

Change, that concept and reality we talk about, analyse, experience, resist and dread.

Back when the three organisers of Prairie Galaxy decided it was time to pass on leadership to others (after three successful years) the person we asked to carry the ball said yes ... and then six months later decided not to follow through. Without leadership Prairie Galaxy collapsed. I was furious. Such a good idea, so successful ... if it's working, why break it? I dreamt about

several long-lasting grisly endings for that person (it was a delicious wallow in the mud...). But eventually I accepted that organizations change just like people. They are built out of visions and people and political will and good luck and hard work and trust.

When any of those things change - so does the organization or institution. T memories, the bonds of relationships, the recollection of successes and failures are all taken into the transition - reworked and woven into the fabric of the new creation. The outcome is a transformation - and if it is positive and energising, what results produces new directions, new dreams, new determination.

If it is negative and dehumanising then chaos, loss, suspicion, exclusivity grow faster than crab grass.

The change before us here - the naked Emperor we can all clearly see - is the fact that the present relationship between the CUC and all the Canadian Unitarian Universalist congregations - and the UUA - is in transition.

The 'accord' that regulates the amount of money paid to the UUA through the CUC on behalf of the Canadian congregations for the district services Unitarian Universalist Canadians receive was cancelled several years ago.

The CUC instituted a series of both conversations and feedback sessions with Canadian congregations about this relationship which culminated in a vote last year in Calgary in May at the CUC Annual General Meeting. The motion (which passed by a very healthy majority) directed the CUC to move slowly towards establishing a more independent and focussed national presence.

A negotiating team from both CUC and UUA constituencies was set up to decide what should/could happen next. Change was on its way.

Just what is going on?

Another answer is quite complex because the UUA is also in transition.

Fifteen years ago if I had been asked to describe the UUA, I would have said it was a continental association of congregations of Canadians and Americans (I don't recall ever hearing about the Mexicans, but I now realise the few Mexican congregations were part of this continental grouping) - affirming and promoting the same religious principles and being supported administratively from headquarters in Boston and also in regional centres across the continent (until five years ago one of these centres was in Canada -- the PNWD headquarters was in Vancouver)

The CUC, on the other hand, simply addressed the national concerns and dreams of Canadian Unitarians and Universalists.

If I had been asked eight to ten years ago to describe the UUA I would have added that it seemed to be steadily adding to its membership, congregations from other countries certainly not on this continent. It presented itself then as an international organisation as much as a continental one. Even today there are at least seven other countries that are part of the UUA: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, France, Japan, New Zealand, and the Philippines.

The CUC still simply addresses the national concerns and dreams of Canadian Unitarians and Universalists.

If I were asked today to describe the UUA, I would rather embarrassedly admit that I had overlooked all the work done on behalf of American national concerns and dreams. I would even suggest that in reality the UUA is more like the hippopotamus, the lion and the elephant together: a new UU trinity! Because there is no parallel national organization for the United States. It is part of the UUA.

The CUC remains being there to address the concerns and dreams of Canadian Unitarians and Universalists.

I would also say that there have been murmuring about developing a stronger authentic Canadian voice - slowly growing over the decades - until now it has swelled to a steady and more confident call for greater autonomy.

And what is it you want?

This question could be asked of both the CUC and the UUA. Here, however, is my intuitive, subjective, proud Canadian/ardent continentalist answer:

As a Canadian I want to have a strong national organisation that makes visible to Canadians this hopeful, vibrant faith of ours. I want to stop feeling a combination of frustration and shame that our Unitarian Universalist population has not grown in 30 years - and if you take into consideration Canada's increase in general population, it has actually gone down. Our Canadian growth consultant in the St. Lawrence District - Linda Hicks, under the able guidance of District Consultant Wendy Colby, has caused our Ontario membership to grow. Could we possibly improve this phenomenon if it were a Canada-wide effort?

As a continentalist I want to be part of a continental association as a peer - not as a poor cousin. I want to be present to discuss continental concerns, share with pride our resources and delight in the American ones; worship and celebrate together the diverse paths we take to transform our religious values into love and justice in our communities and in the larger world. I want to remain joined by our religious principles - the foundation of my life - principles that affirm worth and dignity, compassion, acceptance and hope: principles that encourage us to practise interdependence even more than independence.

It is a fascinating fact that a video is about to be released (under the auspices of the CUC) - a video about lifespan religious education that captures voices and images from Canada and from the American side of the SLD. It will be released within the month and it definitely portrays Unitarian Universalist Lifespan religious education on both sides of the border. I hope you will celebrate its positive message for us all when you see it...and use it in your congregations.

I want to learn to accept change; to take the risks that change requires and know that I am a full participant. I want to remember that the democracy we champion is only as good as our will and actions make it.

Democracy is the most recent CLF newsletter heading in the May 2001 issue. It quotes Unitarian Theodore Parker (May 29, 1850):

"A democracy - that is a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people, of course, a government of the principles of eternal justice...for shortness' sake, I will call it the idea of Freedom."

And here is another perception of democracy from Canada's feminist Nellie McClung - one of five women who successfully forced the Canadian government in 1925 to accept the legal concept that women were persons. She said:

"Democracy has its faults; the people may run the country to the dogs, but they will run it back again. People, including women, will make mistakes, but in paying for them they will learn wisdom."

If we take from these two statements the concepts of eternal justice,

freedom, and making mistakes but learning wisdom we will all do more than survive. We will be able to celebrate whatever forms and functions arise when the dust settles on the negotiations. It will not be what presently is - the status quo is not an option - it will be something expected and unexpected - something propelling us into the future. It will be the result of change - one of the few absolutes in our impermanent world.

Although I cry and lament over things not staying the same, I invite you to join me to work to understand why (with attentive minds and caring hearts) why this transition is occurring.

The celebration is not now - the change is too deep for that - but it will come - if we can minister to each other with respect and affection - if our faith in our faith and the future means more to us than fear of the unknown.

Canadian poet Gwendolyn MacEwen writes about the search we are all on to discover meaning. Her metaphor is geography (and sensual!), and her ending pushes us to be involved - sinew, mind and heart - in unfolding that meaning - and then unfolding it again. Here is the poem, called, "The Discovery."

### The Discovery

do not imagine that the exploration  
ends, that she has yielded all her mystery  
or that the map you hold  
cancels further discovery

I tell you her uncovering takes years,  
takes centuries, and when you find her naked  
look again,  
admit there is something else you cannot name,  
a veil, a coating just above the flesh  
which you cannot remove by your mere wish

when you see the land naked, look again  
(burn your maps, that is not what I mean),  
I mean the moment when it seems most plain  
Is the moment when you must begin again.

Gwendolyn MacEwen, in *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, 1982

I mean, the moment when it seems most plain, is the moment when we must begin again.

And then we can celebrate.

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