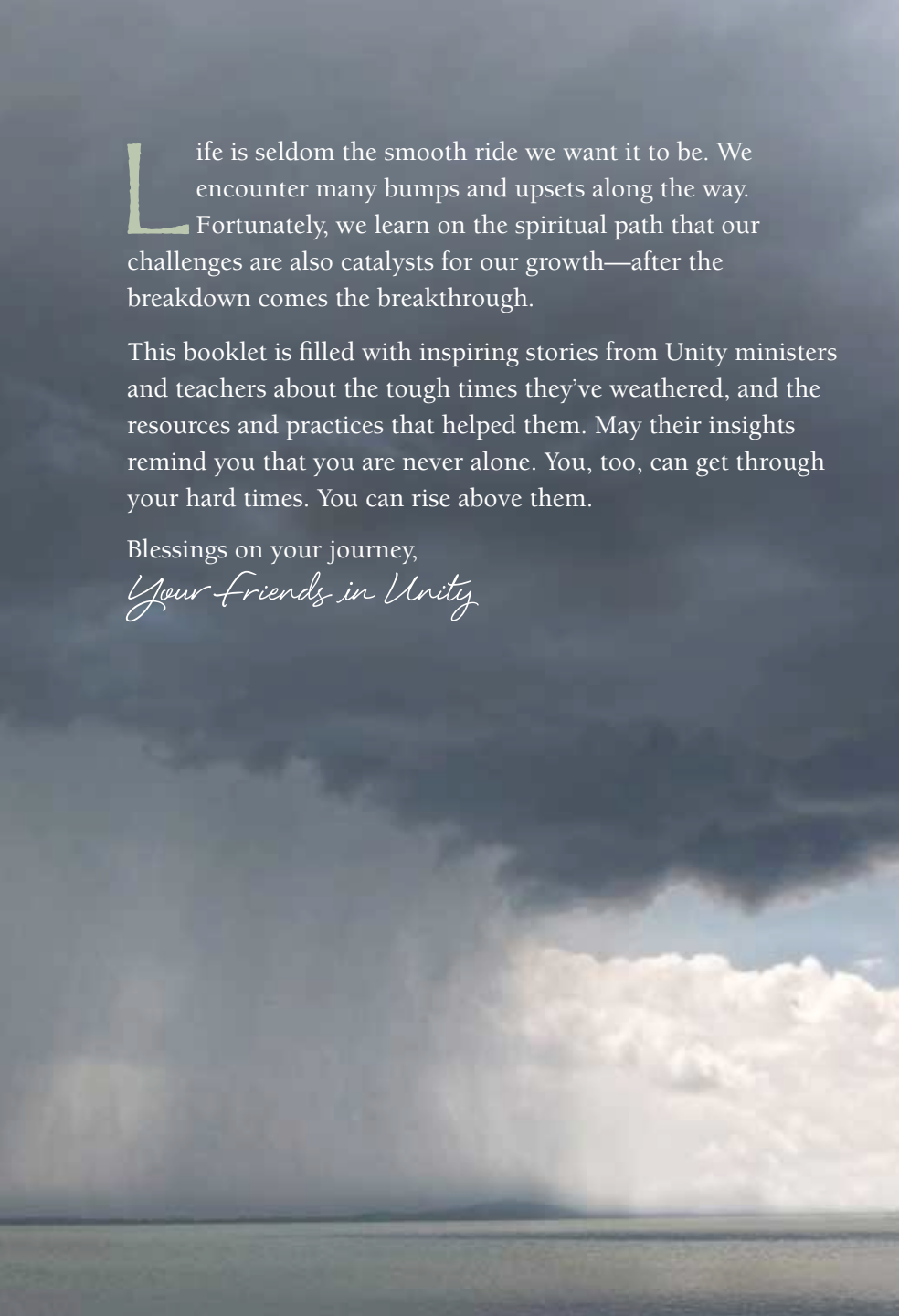


A photograph of a wooden park bench in a field of tall grass. A large tree with yellowing leaves is on the left side of the frame. The background is a soft, hazy green. The text 'GETTING THROUGH the HARD TIMES' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

GETTING  
THROUGH  
*the* HARD TIMES

## **A Message of Support**

Our ministry is supported primarily by the freewill offerings of friends like you. Your generosity helps make it possible for us to offer this inspirational booklet. Our desire is to make Unity literature available to everyone who wants it, especially those most in need of spiritual encouragement.



Life is seldom the smooth ride we want it to be. We encounter many bumps and upsets along the way. Fortunately, we learn on the spiritual path that our challenges are also catalysts for our growth—after the breakdown comes the breakthrough.

This booklet is filled with inspiring stories from Unity ministers and teachers about the tough times they've weathered, and the resources and practices that helped them. May their insights remind you that you are never alone. You, too, can get through your hard times. You can rise above them.

Blessings on your journey,

*Your Friends in Unity*

# Spirit Is Always Speaking

*By Rev. Lesley Miller*

I didn't want to go to the St. Patrick's Day party. The hostess was not someone I knew well, nor a person in my sober circle. I was still reeling from the news days earlier that I faced a full mastectomy instead of the lumpectomy and radiation the breast surgeon originally proposed. I wasn't going to be much fun at a party.

Ten years earlier, a drinkfest was how I dealt with bad news ... or good news. That wasn't how I handled life anymore. Getting drunk wasn't going to make anything better. Still, I had no idea how to deal with this final diagnosis. Only a few friends knew about my months of appointments and tests. They had kept me going. My optimism had finally run out. Cancer. Mastectomy. My fears ran rampant.

I only remember one person at the party, but I don't remember her name. I can't tell you what she looked like. After some



chitchat, I dumped my fear and anxiety on this total stranger, sharing all I was going through. I saw her energy change. She had been there—diagnosis, mastectomy, treatment, reconstruction—the whole thing! She wanted me to know she was now healthier and happier than she had ever been. But how?

Someone gave her a book that completely changed her outlook. It was an old book—Dr. Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*. After reading it, she knew she would be okay.

I didn't have to buy the book, as she suggested. I had it at home but never opened it! Other books, videos, CDs, and even church sermons had helped me through my years of recovery, divorce, single parenting, and starting a career. Teachers showed up when I was ready.

I discovered Unity in much the same way. Ideas I did not know about and could never imagine came my way—shining light on my path. My world was expanded, and I was given opportunities to question old beliefs and patterns of thinking. When I am open or ready, spiritual gifts come from unexpected, remarkable places! God speaks through others, bringing new possibilities. Spirit is endlessly showing me the way and answering any need.

I only read a few chapters of the book before it happened—the shift in my fears and emotions. The message hit me right between the eyes: Whatever happened through my cancer journey, even if it ended my physical life, I would be okay. God was greater than this one physical experience, and so was I.

Wasn't this the lesson Jesus taught? We are spiritual beings, and life is eternal. This knowing got me through breast cancer. It also enabled me to encourage others, just as that woman encouraged me. A book carrying a message I needed got me through the toughest time I have ever faced. Today I am healthier and happier than ever before ... and I want the same for you.

# It's a Quiet Thing

By Rev. Ed Townley

As I look back at the path I've taken through this particular life experience, I can recognize many moments of high drama. They were usually the result of error choices on my part. The more off-course my always well-intended choice, the more noisy and dramatic the consequences. I can easily see the presence of Spirit moving me through it. Yet, as I appreciate my miraculous journey, I find the same infinitely wise and loving Spirit has expressed in quiet ways, in unexpected moments.

When I think of getting through hard times, I remember my younger self roaming around New York City. I lived in a tiny furnished room and struggled to stay afloat with minimum-wage, temporary jobs. I had already turned the most significant corner of my life by reluctantly accepting a 12-step program, but I was doing it on my terms. I went from work to a meeting, then back to my lonely room. I spoke to no one and contributed nothing. I went through my daily routine, rigidly controlled by my ego mind.

One Saturday night I returned from a meeting and was suddenly overwhelmed by despair. Was my life to be nothing but this grey emptiness? Suddenly—and to my utter shock—I found myself on my knees beside my bed! I didn't know to whom or what I was addressing my plea, but it didn't matter. My prayer was simple: *I give up. The pain and loneliness are unbearable. If there is, indeed, a higher power out there, I need help.*

The next morning I awoke in the same bed, in the same bleak room. However, the moment I opened my eyes, everything



seemed brand-new. The heaviness had been lifted. I went to an afternoon meeting, spoke to people, and went for coffee with them afterward. Within a month I was out of that room and my life had changed dramatically. What I now consider my “willing participation” on my spiritual journey was about to take me to amazing places.

Many high dramas and epic catastrophes had led me to the 12 steps. More came as I struggled to keep my spiritual balance. They happen to all of us—they’re part of the creative work that is ours to do.

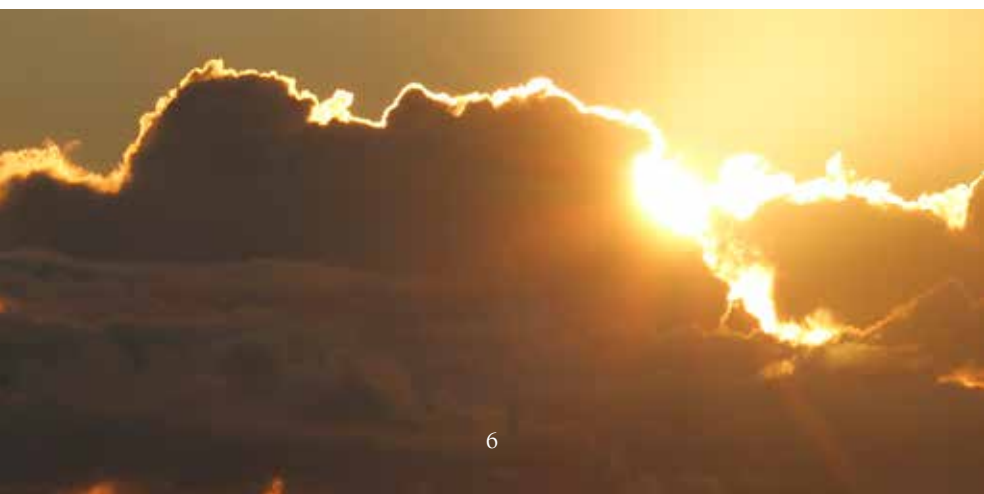
To this day, the subtle stillness of that Saturday night still moves me to tears. I had no crisis, no panic, no conflict—simply surrender. It’s a quiet thing.

# Let the Hard Times Roll

*By Rev. Michael Korpan*

I remember being exceptionally poor when I was about 10 or 11 years old. I had one pair of shoes and had worn through the stitches of one of the soles. As I walked down the street, the sole would flap up and down reminiscent of Garfield Goose or some other puppet flapping its mouth as it spoke. I held my shoe together with a rubber band until my classmates laughed at me; then I cut off the sole. This worked for about a week until the insole also wore away, and I was essentially walking in my socks. I went to a Catholic grammar school and started every day with mass and communion. I would refrain from receiving communion because I did not want to kneel at the communion rail, exposing my bare foot to the entire congregation. This led to speculation by my friends about what sin I must have committed that kept me from the sacrament.

I remember how the physical discomfort I experienced was not always terrible. I was young, healthy, and could manage as





long as it was not raining or snowing. Rather, my dread in this experience and others like it came from my constant fear of being embarrassed for being poor. The pain was in my constant shame for not having enough.

More significant, these thoughts and feelings gave me the opportunity to decide whether or not I was enough. Looking back, I have come to realize there is no one-time answer to that question. Rather, knowing I am enough has been and continues to be an ongoing process. This process is an intricate part of my life and of the human experience. The power to affirm our own adequacy is always ours to claim.

Living in that power does not mean denying the harshness of difficult times, or succeeding or overcoming in spite of circumstances. It means embracing hard times as the means for growing and realizing higher awareness. Circumstances that bring hard times are always temporary. For example: The soles of my shoes no longer flap. However, the way we respond to tough circumstances is enduring. It defines who we are and how we engage in the creative process. It provides the ending to the sentence, "I AM \_\_\_\_\_." If we truly yearn for the good times, we should be eager to "let the hard times roll."



# Faith in the Children of God

*By Rev. Elise Cowan*

Several years ago, tornadoes ravaged not only my hometown in Alabama, but also many other towns and cities. My heart was crushed by the news, and I felt God urging me to go help them.

I ended up at a rescue mission for receiving and distributing donations to help the victims. After working several hours, I went outside for a breath of fresh air. I made my way to the edge of the workers. What I saw burned into my memory like a lover's first kiss.

Dozens of people were unloading an 18-wheeler, each person with a quiet determination. I imagined a musical symphony, each person working in harmony. *Who are these people?* I wondered.



I focused on a Caucasian woman dressed in slacks and a blouse, her hair and makeup stylish and polished. A simple cross hung from a chain around her neck. She carried an armload of toiletries into the school collection point.

I scanned the crowd and spotted a man with a yarmulke and full beard. *He must be Jewish.* As he unloaded water, sweat sprinkled his rosy cheeks. Next, I noticed a group of African Americans. They chatted among themselves and worked as a team, organizing the donations as they were unloaded. A few Eastern women with hijabs wrapped around their heads, in the Islamic style, approached the group and began working with them. As the Jewish man made his way back to the truck, they asked for his assistance in moving a large donation.

I stood stock-still, mesmerized by the scene before me. As I took a deep breath, I smelled charcoal burning, wafting through the air. My stomach rumbled, urging me to find the grill. However, for the moment, I couldn't move anything but my eyes.

I saw young people, old people, some looked wealthy in their fancy clothes, some middle class. I saw a man wearing the Star of David on his necklace, a woman with a dot at the center of her forehead. Each person worked in total harmony with everyone else to get the donations inside. It took my breath away. I saw the divinity of God in those people. Everyone, regardless of religion or cultural status, came together to help the victims.

A tear rolled down my cheek. Never before had I witnessed such enormity of love and compassion among the children of God.

When I hear news reports or concerns about divisiveness, I remember what I saw that day. I am at peace because I know God's presence dwells within us all.

# A Strong Back and a Soft Front

*By Rev. Mark Fuss*

*“I believe that it takes a strong back and a soft front to face the world.”*

Several years ago, when I heard Buddhist teacher and activist Roshi Joan Halifax speak those words, they resonated in every cell of my body.

She continued: “All too often our so-called ‘strength’ comes from fear, not love; instead of having a strong back, many of us have a defended front. In other words, we walk around brittle and defensive ... If we strengthen our backs, metaphorically speaking, and develop a spine that’s flexible but sturdy, then we can risk having a front that’s soft and open.”

“A strong back and a soft front.” That night in my hotel room, I wrote feverishly in my journal. As the tears flowed, I scribbled one example after another from my life when I mistook a defended front for a strong back. What I had thought was perseverance, strength, and edurance was only my brittle defense.

I could also clearly see my spiritual growth through the years. My first two years in recovery from addiction were definitely a defended and brittle front. With no spiritual support system in place, all the anger and fear inside me had no place to go but out. I was either possessed by the power of my past or consumed by my fear of the future.

After two years of struggle, my heart yearned for spiritual community and a better way, which led me to Unity. I soon

learned about mindfulness and meditation, which helped me recognize when I was fearful or defensive. When I could see my fear, I could choose not to react.

I also learned about the power of strength as spiritual courage and confidence. Only when I am centered and aware of my feelings can I exhibit the strong back Roshi Joan spoke of. Also, only when I can come from a place of vulnerability and compassion can I live with a soft front.

Today, whenever I find myself in a difficult or oppressive situation, or when life is hard and hope seems far away, my inner voice reminds me: *strong back, soft front.*



# When Things Can't Hide Anymore

*By Rev. Frieda King*

We had a suspicious spot on our master bedroom ceiling, growing darker and darker. My husband noticed it and went to the attic to investigate. When he came down, he was holding a cutoff plastic half-gallon Coke bottle filled with dirty water.



Most likely, a worker in our attic a number of years ago accidentally broke the pipe, cut the bottle, and shoved it in the attic insulation to take care of any leak. The leak eventually filled the bottle, spilled over, and began discoloring our ceiling.

We fixed the leak and now we will repaint our ceiling. The nastiness came to light to be restored.

Nature, people, and life in general appear to heal in this manner. All of a sudden the truth is revealed, and cleansing is needed.

The Bible tells us about the nature of cleansing, healing, and revealing: “For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light” (Luke 8:17). We see this in the news, we witness it in our own lives, and in the healing of our physical bodies.

I recently had pneumonia. At first, I thought of the mental and emotional causes, but then something surfaced from inside. A voice within said, *This is an inner healing of deserving forgiveness.* A feeling of deep, forgiving love swept over me. I moved to a truer sense of self-forgiveness for whatever I buried and could not let go of. In my physical being, junk had accumulated in the center of my chest. I could not get to it by outer remedies alone.

I went to a doctor, was cared for, and have healed. My inner revelation occurred simultaneously with the physical healing. Indeed, the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual expressions of our being work together for our greater good and for the highest benefit of all.

The next time you are presented with a mystery or puzzling matter, know it is life’s incredible way of uncovering something—a feeling, an idea, a message, or a cleansing and healing—to make way for deeper understanding and a greater expression of your well-being.

# Honor It, Embrace It, and Bless It

*By Rev. Margaret Flick*

Our lives and our perception of our lives can change in an instant. The phone rings and the news isn't good: The doctor's office wants a third test; you receive a grim diagnosis; a loved one has died; your world changes overnight because of divorce, losing a job, and so on. These are difficult situations.

We can call upon the Twelve Powers within us to turn difficulty into a state of grace. For example, we summon our Faith knowing that God is present in every situation. We call upon Strength to help us stay centered. We invoke Wisdom to make right decisions, and we allow Love to help us remember the Truth of who we are. We call upon Understanding to give us insight, and Imagination to go beyond our fears and dark thoughts. We invoke the power of Life by honoring our feelings and embracing our pain, knowing our Power will help us move through it, and Release will help us let go of fear and limiting thoughts.

These teachings have helped me get through painfully difficult times. I have seen "miracles" and deep transformation happen, for me and others.

We are so blessed in Unity to have not only the awareness of the Twelve Powers, but the knowledge that we are never alone. The presence of God is nearer than hands and feet, closer than our breath. God is within us and within the friends and fellow travelers who show up to support us. We have everything we need to do what we are called to do.



# Flip It!

*By Rev. Toni Stephens Coleman*

Feeling down in the dumps?

A grey day with

No spare change?

No café au lait today?

Flip it!

Just wrecked your car?

Well, you're walking away;

Fought with your partner?

Well, other times you agree.

Missed a payment today?

Well, pay it tomorrow.

Flip it!

You're alive

You are free to disagree

Flip it and find the certainty

That God is the only guarantee

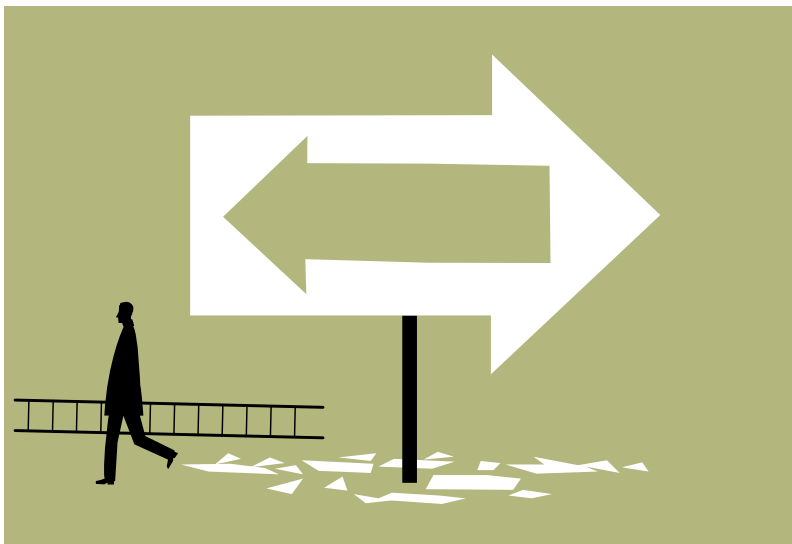
That will serve you

No matter how hard times may be.

Flip it!

Find the Maker's Mark

On the bottom.



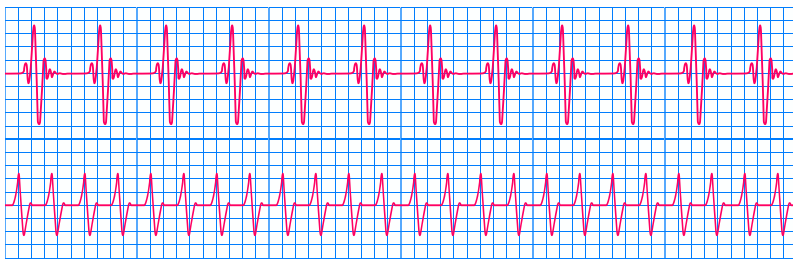
# More Than You Can Imagine

*By Rev. Don Lansky*

I was having a typical rushed morning. I stopped at our local grocery store to pick up some lunch on my way to our Unity center. As soon as I got through the checkout line, I felt my heart beating rapidly, cold sweat, and feeling faint. I knew this was not an ordinary experience.

Being an intrepid Unity minister, I sat for a few moments and then drove to church where I had back-to-back meetings throughout the day. At some point, I told my wife and cominister, Patricia, that I thought I was “having an event.” I asked her to leave early with me so I could go to the emergency room.

After an examination, blood test, and X-rays, the doctors determined that I had a mild heart attack and should go to the hospital for observation and further tests. Without any prior conditions, and only being a hospital patient when I was 2 years old for a hernia operation, I became a participant in an unwanted adventure that I could never have imagined.



More tests showed that one of my arteries was 100 percent blocked and two others were 90 percent blocked. I needed triple

bypass open-heart surgery without delay. Doctors said it was a miracle that I was alive. Two days later, after being transferred to another hospital, I underwent the 6½-hour bypass operation.

Have you ever contemplated the question, *What would you do if you knew you only had one more day to live?* Little could I have known that I would be lying in a drab hospital room on what might have been my last day on earth. I used that day to call my close relatives and the handful of childhood friends I had known for 50 years, just to say “thank you.” If I might die the next day, at least I could go out on appreciation, gratitude, and thanksgiving.

The days and weeks after surgery are becoming an ever-more faint memory, but I have a secret to share—something that kept me going and helped me (and continues to help me) in my healing process. The day before my surgery, a Unity minister friend sent me a quote from Ephesians 3:20, which I recorded into my iPhone and listened to over and over again throughout the long and painful hospital days and nights: “Spirit can do immensely more than all I could ever imagine, according to its purpose—working within me” (translation from “The Message”).

What soothing and affirming words! I can let go and let Spirit within me do the healing work. Spirit knows how to knit back my bones, get my blood to flow to all the right places, and heal my heart. In my limited human understanding, I don’t know how this will happen. Thankfully, I know “Spirit within me can do immensely more than I could ever imagine.”

It’s true for me, and it’s true for you too. Whatever you’re going through, whether it’s healing from a health challenge, a relationship, a difficult situation, or a financial setback, Spirit within you can do “immensely” more than you can possibly imagine. All you need to do is trust and have faith.

# Pushing Forward

*By Joyce Flowers*

Do the thing  
That's hard to do  
The one  
Your heart  
Is drawn unto  
And in the pinch  
You'll find the inch  
Of growing and knowing  
To get you through.

# A Very Hard Day

*By Rev. Barbara Hadley*

“You’ve been buffeted around for the past 18 months,” my husband Tom said as he held me gently. “There’ve been so many losses—it’s a wonder you’ve held up this long.”

I couldn’t answer. Trying to speak would only bring up anger and tears that I didn’t want. Even his holding me brought up difficult feelings to manage. And the tears came anyway. Shouldn’t I be able to handle all the problems that come my way?

Tom and I sat together—no other words spoken. My mind jumped from one negative thought to another, playing out each to its worst conclusion. I desperately wanted to make myself feel better, but this was all I could do: Think of one negative



complaint after another about how life was incredibly difficult and treating me wrong.

I sat there until I was wrung out, unable to cry one more tear or argue one more idea. Tom gently released his embrace. He stood up, took his phone out, punched in a number, and handed it to me. “Here,” he said, then went to the kitchen to start dinner.

I put the phone to my ear and heard someone say, “Silent Unity, how may we pray with you?” I immediately felt resistance.

I didn’t deserve to pray with Silent Unity—their work was

precious and my problems were insignificant compared to others. The voice repeated, “This is Silent Unity. How may we pray with you?”

I felt the caring love from that voice wash over me, and I managed to say,

“Inner peace ... I need some inner peace. Can you help me?” They prayed with me, and I began to feel a little better.

After the prayer, I got up and went to get the mail, sort the bills, and set the table. Life resumed. It was a difficult day after many difficult days strung together. Life was unpredictable, out of my control. And yet Tom had brought me Silent Unity, a prayer partner to help me through. That had been enough.

*Silent Unity can be reached 24/7 at 1-800-NOW-PRAY for free, personal prayer support.*



# Wearing the World as 'Loose Garment'

*By Rev. John Beerman*

“Give thanks for the tough times, because without them, we might not recognize the good times.” I clung to this idea for dear life when I was asked to resign from my dream job. The grieving process ensued, and I recalled the stages of grief over and over again: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance.

I began to search for something more substantial than the thought that I needed to experience hard times for good times to reappear. I knew I had a spiritual lesson to learn. I rededicated myself to prayer and meditation. I made my prayers more sincere—not begging, but becoming totally transparent (authentic) with God. I also added more time and focus to my meditations.

Finally, I waited. Each life experience gave me an opportunity to discover a spiritual truth, but I didn't know what it was yet.



At last, I began to sense it, to know it, and to experience it.

Life does not bring tough times or good times. My life and every experience are exactly how I perceive them to be. My perceptions determine my reactions, and even more important, my emotional well-being.

St. Francis of Assisi suggested that “we wear the world as loose garment.” I began to visualize the peace and presence of God washing over me, saturating my conscious and subconscious mind.

I feel more open now to life events and less quick to label them as good or bad. The events are not choosing me, nor are they random. They simply are how I perceive them to be.

I now intentionally bring my heart and soul to every life exchange, fully engaged, whenever possible. I try not to identify a circumstance as right or wrong, but with equanimity.

Of course, life continues to throw fastballs, curveballs, and changeups. However, I have learned to observe each pitch until it hits my outstretched glove. I then hand it to the home plate umpire, who gently holds the ball and puts it back in play.





# Spiritual Witness

By Rev. Toni Stephens Coleman



After I saw pictures of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, I asked myself why I have such a traumatic response to other people's pain. I saw a picture of a baby half buried in the street, held tightly by his buried, dead mother. They tried desperately to dig him out, but there was nothing anyone could do. He died two hours after the picture was taken. To this day, I weep for that baby, his mother, and the thousands of people buried alive that day.

The terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, has the same effect on me. I wasn't there except through TV, pictures, and stories, but when I think of it, I feel the ash in my nose.

We all have experiences like these where we are not personally traumatized, yet we *are* traumatized, and it feels personal!

I ask myself: *Why am I so deeply affected?* My response is: I am a spiritual being having an earthly experience. I am the eyes, ears, hands, and feet of something beyond my body. I am part of a whole.

As a “witness,” I AM a sensory receptor for God. God lives life in, through, and as me. To experience life is the reason Source is incarnate in this body. How else could God know God Self, see God Self, interact with God Self, and experience anything, except to have created this illusion of separation, a mirror image of God in me? I am the image and likeness of God, and as Jesus, my Elder Brother, said, “The Father and I are one.”

Through “witnessing,” each experience is magnified and multiplied. So, not only does the primary experience add to the experience of God, but each additional person who witnesses a traumatic event adds a unique energy dimension.

As a witness to life as well as a primary experiencer, I magnify life and add to life, whether the experience is joyful or painful for me. I do not believe suffering is purposeless. I believe it makes humans greater. If this is so, it is also true that suffering makes our awareness of God greater.

This awareness allows me to step back from pain and surrender to the experience. It is all God. It is all good. I witness my own trauma, my own difficult times, and yet I remember I am a spiritual being. I am here to experience all types of things. My soul is not harmed, but magnified and enhanced.

We are all becoming more sensitized. Only now is it possible to experience our own trauma and that of others at such a vast, diverse spiritual level. We are spiritual witnesses, developing, transforming, and growing in sensitivity, empathy, and compassion.

# Hard Times: A Setup for Better Times

By Joyce Flowers

We've all had times so hard that they felt unbearable. It can be hard to eat; it's miserable to sleep. We wake at 2 and 3 and 4 a.m., and finally give up and start the morning coffee. They are times when even breathing is something we must coach ourselves to do: Breathe in (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and breathe out (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) and again. Waking up brings an infinitesimal respite from the pain, until we remember, and it all comes flooding back.

I don't know why hard times come, but I also don't know a soul who has not had them. I only know that getting through them strengthened my faith and steeled my resilience. Here's what I did to help myself:

*I read spiritual books and materials.* Daily Word was the first thing I put into my mind upon awakening to take the place of bleakness. I always had at least five books from my local Unity bookstore to provide an uplifting set of messages—new thoughts I might otherwise never have considered.

*I established prayer rituals.* For me, it was a set of four stones that stayed in my car for my lengthy drive to work. The first stone was an affirmation: *Mother/Father God, I know that you love me, and I love you.* Next, the prosperity stone: *I live in God's abundance and God's abundance lives in me.* I also had a stone for



prayers for others and for myself. Last, the large, smooth gratitude stone, I held in my hand and used to recite things for which I was grateful until it conformed to my body temperature. I kept a healthy routine, including a good diet and exercise four times a week. Jogging helped boost my spirits for the following day.

*I took classes and stayed connected with my church and a spiritual community. I took Keys to the Kingdom, the Four Ts prosperity class, Unity Basics, A Course in Miracles, and a class on grief.*



*I let myself grieve my loss. With the help of a counselor, I let myself lean into the pain I was experiencing rather than pushing it away.*



*I wrote in my journal to show myself I was improving. Each day's entry demonstrated that—little by little—I was getting better, stronger, and wiser.*

*I stayed busy with work that involved service to others. It helped me shift the focus from myself and do good work that served the greater society.*

If you are going through a hard time—and this is hard to do—say thank you. Thank the universe for showing you how strong you are now and how strong you will become. Better times *will* return, and a happier, healthier, more resilient you will be there to greet them.

# God Is Not the Magic Eight Ball

By Rev. Douglas Duerr



When I am seeking answers, God is not the Magic Eight Ball. I find clarity through a sacred time of living in the question. Sometimes it takes longer than I'd like. It's easy to affirm, *It's all good*, but what do we do when that affirmation seems empty or slow to manifest?

I had a time in my adolescence when God felt distant. At least that was the perception in my mind. And that is the key: "In my mind." I create the distance, the heaviness, and the sense of victimhood. However, I can just as quickly reverse it and create something new.

During prayer or morning meditation, I remember God's mighty peace within me. I recognize any discontent that may have settled within me, and allow it to come up and then dissipate.

The world may take us for a ride, but through the power of divine wisdom, we can come home again. My divine guidance comes from communing with the One Presence, restoring my gratitude for the sweet Truth of life.

We are divinely created to witness the dynamic push-pull of life. The Sufi mystic Rumi writes, "Your hand opens and closes. If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed." We breathe in and breathe out, and the answers come.

# The New Curriculum

*By Rev. Dr. Claudell County*

During my 17-year teaching career at Unity Institute® and Seminary, I experienced a variety of classroom challenges with student behavior, but the last class was particularly difficult, for different reasons. All of the Institute's classes would soon be transferred to Unity Worldwide Ministries and converted to an online format. Students were pondering the impact of the changes. In addition, I was retiring. All of us, in one way or another, were grieving.

The first day of our three-week intensive class began with nervous chaos. Few students could focus on the class because of anxiety about their uncertain future in school. I allowed time for processing these feelings, and I thought we were doing okay until I found several students out of their seats mocking each other and me. The disruption and disrespect continued throughout the class. I expected things to be better the next day, but it was more of the same. It was impossible to teach, my temper rose, and I snapped before the first break, yelling at the troublemakers. During the break, I prayed for guidance: *Spirit within, you know that I know what to do; help me remember it.*

When the students returned, I acknowledged that all of us were grieving our losses with destructive and less-than-helpful behavior in class. Disrespectful behavior didn't heal our emotional wounds; it kept them fresh and raw. I invited the class to join me in a healing experiment to learn how to treat others when feeling deep emotions ourselves. They agreed.

First, we described our experience of the first day and a half in one descriptive word. The blackboard was filled with words such as: stressed, humiliating, anxious, overwhelmed, disrespected, detached, unsafe, fearful, doom and gloom, despair, resistance, confusion, disorganized, sad, tired, excited, ignored, hurried, and chaotic.

Next, I invited them to describe in one word what they would rather experience in class. We wrote: fellowship, gratitude, hope, love, oneness, respect, tolerance, order, support, calmness, acceptance, patience, harmony, safety, and peace. Each person chose their three highest values and marked them with a check. We circled the 10 words with the most votes.

Finally, each student chose one of the 10 words and promised to hold it secretly and sacredly in his or her heart for the rest of the course. I handed out small Tibetan prayer flags on which they could write their word. My word was *calm*, and I visualized and affirmed that each of us remained calm throughout the class.



I led a meditation, and we resumed coverage of the course's topic. The rest of the day was calm, as was the next, and so on for the entirety of the class. On the final day, we celebrated our success in self-management and also the demonstration of faith that the future holds for each of us a perfect and loving outcome.

How do we get through the hard times? Ask for guidance. Name the problem. Visualize the good. Embody the good. Meditate. Give thanks and celebrate. Bless you.



## Diving Deep

*By Rev. Dale Worley*

In the fall of 2004, I was in the midst of intense grieving and loss. A close family member had passed away, an intimate personal relationship had ended suddenly, and I had no source of steady income. Although I had made a decision to move with my young son to another state to pursue a new career, I had no idea where I would find the resources to make that happen. I wasn't eating and couldn't sleep for more than a few hours at a time.

Spiritual teachers such as Eckhart Tolle and Gangaji recommend living in the moment. If I am suffering, they suggest, I am



struggling against what is and believing things should be different. My “now” moment was not pleasant at this time, and I could not possibly see how the Universe might be conspiring for my highest good.

One morning as I was bustling around my home with no sense of purpose or direction, I realized I was doing everything I could to run away from my feelings of grief and loss. I remembered an invitation from Gangaji to dive deeply into a challenging situation and see what was there for me.

I sat down in a chair and said aloud to God, “Okay, here I am! Let me feel these feelings to the best of my ability. I’m willing to give this a try.” I did my best to slow down my breathing and my thinking, and to investigate what it was like to experience grief. I tried to be as present as possible to what was going on in my body, my mind, and my emotions.

Suddenly I felt the most profound and unexpected sense of peace and calm. It only lasted a moment, but in that moment I had a realization of the Truth: There is a place of stillness and quiet inside me, no matter what is going on around me.

As I rose from my chair, I discovered I was still upset, afraid, and confused. However, I now had an overwhelming feeling that everything was going to be okay. I had found hope in the midst of despair!

Eventually, everything worked out for the best for me and my son, and I am so grateful for all the good in our lives today. I can look back on this experience and use it as a touchstone when I am facing challenging situations. In that one moment of diving deep, my *belief* in a power within me shifted to a *knowing* that wherever I am, God truly is!

# I Cry

By Rev. Toni Stephens Coleman

I cry when things hurt me deeply, when times are hard, or I feel scared. As a kid, being the oldest, I was taught to *not* cry. I was taught that if I broke loose with tears, my little sister and brothers would cry, too, so I had to set a good example. No wonder we often came down with colds as our little bodies released the congestion caused by *not* crying!

In a college health class, I learned the science behind this. Crying is a form of elimination linked to our emotions. We wouldn't deny ourselves or our children any other form of elimination. However, we deny ourselves emotional cleansing, and we teach each new generation the same.

Charles Fillmore tells us (under "emotion" in *The Revealing Word*) that each good emotion has a corresponding "bad emotion," and our emotions cause chemical changes in the body. While the good emotions cause healing and soothing chemicals



to flow, Fillmore says the “bad emotions” cause “life-depressing and poisonous” changes in the tissues of the body.

Science finds crying and laughter deeply related as our means for dealing with rapid changes in our autonomic system, the part of our nervous system that controls involuntary actions such as heartbeat and pupil dilation. Both crying and laughter happen when the body shifts from a fight-or-flight state stimulated by the sympathetic nervous system, to a relax-and-restore mode of the parasympathetic nervous system. This is why we can easily laugh when we feel like crying and cry when we feel like laughing. They are both forms of rebalancing.

I took that health class the year before my first husband’s sudden death. I credit the information with saving my life and keeping me healthy. I reminded myself that I know how to *not* cry when it is inappropriate, so I bit my lip, sucked it up, and didn’t cry. I made the hard choices for the memorial service and my living arrangements. I went to the supermarket and discovered I didn’t know what I liked since I had always bought what he liked or what we liked together. I was incredibly lonely and felt the need to cry most of the time.

I developed a technique for holding it together without polluting my body and mind with toxins. I consciously made an appointment with myself *to* cry, and I kept each appointment as if my life depended on it! In a safe place, I allowed myself to wail freely until I was totally emptied and exhausted.

It is no mistake that Elimination is one of the Twelve Powers. It is a powerful principle to create space in us—mind, body, and spirit—for new growth and new life. Crying isn’t all I do, but it can be a good place to start to rebalance body chemistry and make way for healing and restoration. After I recover from a good cry, it is easier to find clarity and strength when times are hard.

# Loss of a Partner

By Rev. Paul John Roach

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to getting through hard times is the fact that we label them as *hard* or *difficult*. Therefore, they become something to avoid, deny, or move through as quickly as possible. We think life must be happy and meaningful, and our tough times are blocking that happiness and meaning. We complain—“Why is this happening to me?” or “Why me, God?”—as if we are unique in our suffering.



We can look at it another way. Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron offers the sage advice to “lean into the sharp points.” In other words, allow yourself to feel what is happening without judgment. Experience the sharpness and immediacy of the hurt without wishing to move beyond it. This acceptance of what is leads not to fatalism but to freedom. We are no longer trying to fix something or make it better. It just is.

Arising from that allowance is the startling recognition that the presence that is watching and witnessing is uncluttered by any story or any need to judge or identify. This presence is spacious and loving, all-encompassing, and incredibly wise.

When my first wife, Davis, died of breast cancer at 56, I felt that our life together of 27 years had vanished into nothingness. The strange feeling of relief I felt for a few hours in the immediate

aftermath of her passing quickly turned into terrible loneliness and heartbreak. I cried daily for several months.

In those months after her death, I found it difficult to remember what her face looked like and even had a hard time recalling the sound of her voice. This frightened me at first, but I came to realize that what I truly knew of her was beyond outer form. As author Gabriel Garcia Marquez said of his wife, “I know her so well that she is completely and utterly unknown to me.”



One morning, a few months into the grieving period, I was sitting alone in the kitchen we had shared for so many years. A glass of water was on the table, and the early morning light filtered through the window and danced on the wall and floor. A supreme calm filled my being, and an awareness came that my grief was both normal and natural. I was in my rightful place, experiencing the jumbled, often chaotic, emotions that accompany loss. A recognition came that my relationship with my dead wife continued, but in a different way.

As I sat at the kitchen table that morning, a poem came spontaneously into my mind:

*Where are you, Davis, after death?  
You are light in the clear water  
Of the glass on my desk,  
Free of all earthly color.*

*You can pass through my brain with ease  
Front to back,  
A wind dagger  
A suggestion that says, "wholly other."*

*You descend, for a moment,  
To touch this struggling form,  
And you're gone.*

*Is that what you are to me now, my love?  
Your imagined face  
The locus of 10,000 haggling memories.*

*Or is the evidence of a heart broken open  
This sometimes willingness  
To dive headlong  
With grief's abandon,  
Into the comforting emptiness of your fiery sky?*

I can't say that it all became easy after that morning. It didn't. I did receive the gift that all is well and that hard times were part of the dance of life. I stopped trying to get through to a better place, and I relaxed into the education offered by each moment.

Today I am happily married to my wife Wendy, and life has unfolded in sometimes ironic but always beguiling and miraculous ways. My late wife and our connection still inform me, but it does not constrict me. I do know that the ability to embrace the hard times has enriched my present relationship. For that I am forever grateful.

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G1249  
Canada BN 13252 9033 RT  
Printed U.S.A.