

Why Doesn't She Leave
Two Rivers Unitarian Universalist Church
Carbondale, CO
March 8, 2015

Service by Nicolette Toussaint

Prelude

"Break the Chain"
Words and Music: Lisa Dancing-Light

Lisa Dancing-Light

Call to Worship

"UU General Resolution on Violence Against Women

Chris Coyle

These words are taken from a general resolution adopted by the UU General Assembly in 1993:

BECAUSE Unitarian Universalists affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and living with dignity includes freedom from physical and emotional violence, and the fear of such violence in the home, workplace, church, and community...

...BE IT RESOLVED that the Unitarian Universalist Association shall act and urge its associate members, affiliate organizations, member congregations, and individual Unitarian Universalists to:

- break the silence by naming and speaking of the violence women experience in their homes, schools, work places, churches, and communities;

- examine the nature and consequences of harassment and the ways in which our social, commercial, and religious institutions sanction harassment of women;
- develop and implement educational programs for children and adults to empower individuals and groups to work at eliminating violence against women;
- develop and implement programs to examine the roles that religious myths and institutions play in fostering violence or in healing its effects;
- promote legislation to stop violence against women...
- promote the creation of safe houses, shelters, counseling centers, and support groups for victims and their dependents; and
- promote personal accountability through intervention and treatment programs, including individual and small group counseling for abusers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Unitarian Universalist Association shall act and urge its...members to support the continental network, Unitarian Universalists Acting to Stop Violence Against Women, in its work, which includes congregation-based programs of worship, ritual, religious education, caring communities, and social action;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that Unitarian Universalist congregations and individual Unitarian Universalists be urged to recognize the pervasive nature of violence against women and to confront the emotional and physical violence in our own families, congregations, and communities.

+Gathering Hymn

"Power Chant"
-Words and Music: Lisa Dancing-Light

Lisa Dancing-Light

Welcome & Announcements

Chris Coyle

- Standard welcome
- News about worship series on violence this month, healing ritual on last Sunday in month
- Introduction of Speakers: Nicolette Toussaint & Julie Olson

Nicolette Toussaint, who is a member of our worship committee and board, served on the national core committee of Unitarian Universalists Acting to Stop Violence Against Women, the organization mentioned in the UU resolution we just heard. She chaired the Violence Against Women Taskforce for the San Francisco Chapter of NOW, the National Organization for Women, and was its president for several years.

During that time, both on behalf of NOW as the Northern California organizer for a participatory, community art project called the Clothesline Project, Nicolette spoke publicly countless times, at schools, hospitals, homeless shelters, women's groups and also at churches of many denominations. The service you are going to hear today is an updated version of a service that Nicolette delivered at about a dozen UU churches across the US, speaking on behalf of UUs Acting to Stop Violence Against Women.

Julie Olson has been the Executive Director of the Advocate Safehouse Project here in the Roaring Fork Valley for the past 20 years. In 2012, she was honored by the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence with a Purple Ribbon Award recognizing Lifetime Achievement. She was nominated for the award by her peers for her 23 plus years of work in the field of domestic violence.

Currently, Julie also serves on the 9th Judicial District Victim Assistance and Law Enforcement Board and the State of Colorado's Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Victim Program's Crime Victim Services Advisory Board.

Julie will join us for a question-and-answer session following today's service.

-Riane Eisler

We envision a world of partnership where limitation and fear will no longer be systematically taught through myths about how inevitably evil and perverse humans are. In this world, children will not be taught epics about men who are honored for being violent, or fairy tales about children who are lost in frightful woods where women are malevolent witches.

They will be taught new myths, new epics and stories in which human beings are good; men are peaceful; and the power of creativity and love – symbolized by sacred chalice, the holy vessel of life – is the governing principle.

For in this world of partnership, our drive for justice, equality and freedom, our thirst for knowledge and spiritual illumination, and our yearning love and beauty will at last be freed... and both women and men will at last find out what being human can mean.

Unison Covenant

Chris Coyle

Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law.
This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace,
to seek the truth in love, and to help one another.

- *James Vila Blake*

Sung Aspiration

#123, "Spirit of Life"

Congregation

Spirit of Life, come unto me. Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion. Blow in the wind, rise in the sea; move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice. Roots hold me close; wings set me free; Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

-*Carolyn McDade*

Reading

Julie Olson

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin?

In small places, close to home

Places so close and so small

that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world

Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice

Equal opportunity

And equal dignity without discrimination.

-*Eleanor Roosevelt*

Recently, when this congregation courageously gathered to wrestle with the topic of evil, Barbara Palmer asked us if we had ever personally confronted evil. I have, and I briefly mentioned that during in our large circle discussion.

It began in 1994, when Margi Laird McCue, the former president of our UU congregation in San Francisco, asked me if I would accompany her to the Marin County jail to meet a woman named Paula Oldham.

Margi Laird McCue is a wonderful woman. She had been the executive director of Catholic Charities in San Francisco, and later headed up a battered women's shelter. She wrote a textbook about domestic violence, and she had also created a domestic violence prevention program for kids; it involved puppets and it was called "No Punching Judy."

Margi and I, along with Reverend Jody Shipley, were organizers of the "UUs Acting to Stop Violence Against Women" group mentioned in my biography.

We had done many worship services and programs together. But until Margi asked me to go with her, I had never been inside a jail. It was dark when we got there, but harsh spotlights lit the perimeter of the concrete cellblock. We sat at a scarred Formica counter, staring into a thick, scratched Plexiglas.

I didn't know what to expect, but soon a woman in a gray-green prison smock appeared behind the Plexiglas. She was about my size, pasty and tired looking, with lank brown hair that was pulled back into a ponytail. It was hard to

reconcile this ordinary woman with the extraordinary story Margi had told me: a story about battering, child abuse and stalking. About fear and fright, secrecy and desperation, an underground railway, leaving the country, armed seizure and international extradition.

Perhaps the author Anna Quindlen tells the story better than I do. Here's what Quindlen wrote in her 1994 column *The Good Mother*:

SOMETIMES WHEN she was in jail awaiting trial, Paula Oldham would wonder what she might have done differently. She had lost so much: her job as a vice president at Wells Fargo, her house in one of the pretty communities near San Francisco, her salary, her savings. Her freedom.

Little by little, she had begun to suspect that her daughter was being molested. Other people saw the signs, but the authorities were unconvinced.

Finally, she took the girl and ran to France. And when they were found, the child went to live with the man Paula believed was a pedophile: her daughter's father, who denies the allegations. So in the end she lost her daughter, too.

The court locked Paula up for decades, and the "justice system" cut off her parental rights – Paula was barred from ever again contacting Christina in any way. Paula lost everything. What I lost, at least for a time, was my faith, a small loss compared to what may have happened to that lost child.

The evil I confronted wasn't just what happened to Paula and Christina, but the injustice of the justice system. It was that the whole world seemed to be indifferent, ineffectual or under the spell of the dark side: The child protective system, the police, the family courts, the criminal courts. Margi and I did all we could. We rallied nonprofits and volunteers, held fundraisers and reached out to the media. Nothing helped.

Paula's ex, Martin Ogawa, was a wealthy Marin County businessman with money enough to pay a private eye and multiple attorneys. He was politically connected to all six county judges who could have heard the case. Paula was broke, blamed and imprisoned. And we lost.

Many years have passed, and many things have changed. Martin Luther King once said that "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." Perhaps it does. The US Department of Justice reports that between 1993 and 2002, the rate of domestic violence in the U.S. fell from an estimated 5.4 victims per thousand to 2.1 victims.

Statistics tell us that between 1993 and 2010, the rate of intimate partner violence in the US actually **declined** 67%. Between 1993 and 2007, killings of women by intimate partners fell by 35% and killings of men declined by 46%.

We should take a moment to appreciate that monumental change. It's due to the shelter movement, to thousands of ordinary people who worked countless hours to change attitudes, laws and procedures. It's due to work done by people like this morning's guest, Julie Olson.

I know we have with us many others who have volunteered for Advocate Safehouse this morning. Would you please rise so that we may recognize you. If there are others here who have volunteered or raised funds for safe houses in other parts of the country, would you please rise.

Please give these people a hand. Their work saves lives. (BE SEATED)

But it's not over. Julie has more work to do, as do we all.

Paula Oldham's case illustrates a truism about violence at home. Many of us think that it doesn't happen here -- not to people we know, not to people like us.

But the truth is that it **does** happen here. Carbondale has just experienced its first homicide in 12 years. Arturo Navarrete-Portillo stabbed his wife on Feb. 16, and will be charged with first-degree murder this month.

The truth is that many of our lives have been touched by family violence. After we take our offering this morning, I will ask you to join me in a candle-lighting ritual that has been done in many UU congregations. Those flames will demonstrate just how much this form of violence touches our lives. But for the moment, let me give you some statistics.

- 6,488 American troops were killed in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2001 and 2012. Nearly double those numbers of women – 11,766 -- were murdered by current or ex male partners here at home during that same time. That amounts to an undeclared war *inside* this country's borders.
- Almost half of all murders in Colorado are committed by an intimate partner. The vast majority of these victims are female.

- Studies suggest that up to 10 million children witness some form of domestic violence annually.
- Men who as children witnessed their parents' domestic violence were twice as likely to abuse their own wives than sons of nonviolent parents. Studies show that witnessing violence between one's parents or caretakers is the strongest risk factor of transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next.

For all we hear about terrorism and drug-related crime, the Federal Centers for Disease Control tells us that a woman is nine times more likely to be assaulted in her own home than on the street. The American Medical Association says that the most dangerous place for an American woman is in her home. And according to the US Surgeon General, domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women—more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.

Of all crimes against women – rape, incest, domestic violence, attacks against lesbians and murder – I think domestic violence is hardest for us to understand because it literally “hits so close to home.” I should note here that women do sometimes commit violence against men, but the FBI statistics tell us that 95 percent of the victims of domestic violence are women and children, and if we want to understand this phenomenon, we need to first look at the rule rather than the exception.

When we begin to examine our own experience – in our childhood homes and adult relationships – most of us have had some experience of domestic violence, even if we haven't called it that. And all of us know about it because it is wound

through and through our culture, from movies and news reports to traditional values taught in fairy tales and the Bible.

I think that it is **this** fact – the fact that we are acculturated to accept violence – that makes it so difficult for us to understand the violence that occurs in our own homes. You can see this just from the questions that are asked when we begin to discuss it. Whenever I have talked about violence against women, in whatever context, the question always comes back to domestic violence and the same old sticky question, “Why doesn’t she leave?”

Why is it that we always ask that, rather than some other question, such as “Why doesn’t he leave?”

When I’m asked the “why doesn’t she leave question”, I usually point out that the question tells us more about **us** than it does about **her**. After all, at this moment, we don’t even know who she is. We know nothing about the details of her life. “She” is merely a figment of our imagination, a projection of our own understanding of the world.

When we ask that question, we make several assumptions: First, that she actually *can* leave. Second, that leaving would make her safe. And third, that she hasn’t left already. In fact, any or all three of these assumptions may be wrong – and it’s surprising how often it’s the last one that’s wrong. Most battered women do leave without being killed, but often, that doesn’t stop the violence, and it doesn’t stop people from asking the question.

Why doesn't she leave? Why do we have such a deep-seated need to ask that question?

I think that when we ask it, we're really saying that in her place, **we** would leave. We're acknowledging our own fear of being hurt and our own will to survive. We're saying that anyone who stays in such a situation must be different from us.

All of us wonder why **this** person was hurt, rather than **that** one. All of us - even those of us who have confronted that fictitious "her" in our *own* mirror in the morning - feel like the one who got singled out *must* have done something wrong.

It's not surprising that victims of sexual violence should feel responsible, guilty, and blamed. When a woman is battered, even friends and family, who should be on her side, say, "What did you do to provoke him? Why did you marry him? Why don't you leave?"

If she is raped, they ask, "Why did you wear that dress? What did you do to lead him on? Why did you invite him in?"

I think we ask these questions not to be cruel, but because we desperately need to believe that we are somehow different. We need to believe that if we, and those close to us, can just wear the right clothes, choose the right men, and say the right words, we will be safe.

Social scientists too, have spent a lot of time looking at victimology. But their studies have found that the victims of family violence have almost nothing in common. Some are some are young, some are old, some are single, some are married. They are educated and uneducated. Their numbers include children. And men who have been attacked. And gays and lesbians. In fact, the rates of

domestic violence in same-gender relationships are roughly the same as the rate for heterosexual women, but they are reported less often.

The focus on trying to understand what the victim did is fruitless, whether the inquirer is a researcher, a friend or family. Worse, it can amount to shaming and blaming the victim—and that will not keep us safe.

Because asking what *she* did to cause *him* to rape her, what *she* did to cause him to beat her, or how *he* caused his *own* murder misses the essential point: Violence is *not* the choice of the victim. It is the *choice of the criminal*.

The *choice* of the criminal. *Choice* - that is an essential point. Violence is a *choice*. It is an alternative to asking permission, to walking away, to filing for divorce, or negotiating a compromise. All of these are choices. And they are *all learned* behavior. And therein is the tragedy: We are not born to violence, *violence is something we learn*. If we could learn something else, we could choose something else.

Sadly, we all learn violence.

Rates of domestic violence do vary for different ethnic groups and classes. And they vary in different nations and cultures: In Paraguay, the rate may be as low as 10 %, while in India, around 70% of women are victims of domestic violence and “bride burning” occurs every two hours. Domestic violence also is higher in some ethnic groups in the US, typically those that have rigid and unequal gender roles. And that fact, again, underscores that role that culture plays in teaching us that violence is an acceptable way of solving problems in relationship. It’s a learned behavior.

Most of our human behavior is learned the same way that other animals learn: monkey see monkey do. Scientists call it modeling and imitation. As children, we watch what adults do, and we repeat the behavior. That's how kids learn a lot of words we wish that they didn't know – and a great deal more.

There's a phenomenon called pecking-order violence. It goes like this: Mom and dad are arguing. Little brother starts to cry, and the dog starts to howl. In the midst of all this chaos, dad loses it and pushes mom. Big sister screams and mom slaps her, to shut her up. Angered at that injustice, sister shoves her brother, who was crying first. And then little brother kicks the dog.

The lesson portrayed in that scenario: might makes right.

In this country, we learn violence from many sources, even if we're fortunate to grow up in a peaceful home. Every American child watches 200,000 violent acts on TV before turning 16. One of every 8 Hollywood films shows a rape. And polls indicate that 25 percent of all Americans think domestic violence is okay, so they repeat it and their children learn it.

One of the saddest statistics I have read is that at 85% of the men in prison grew up in homes where **they** were exposed to domestic violence.

When we see violence all around us, we grow numb. We begin to think it's normal.

The notion that violence is normal explains a great deal about why she, that fictitious woman, might not leave. She might think what I did: "Even if I go

somewhere else with someone else, it will be more of the same." And for her, there may *be* nowhere else to go.

I was one of the lucky ones; I had someplace to go, When I was in college in Boulder, I was married to a man who repeatedly threatened me, shoved me, and pushed me down the basement stairs. Then one morning, when I got out of the shower, I found him pointing a rifle at me. I begged, apologized, and finally talked my way out of the house. Then, as soon as I could, I left and I hid. For a month, I lived on a friend's couch, and then I fled the state. I was an impoverished college student, so all I had to lose were my pets, my small bank account, my clothes, nearly every friend and all the professional connection I had made during journalism school.

I lived in Illinois for six years, then in California for more than 20. I stayed out of Colorado for more than a decade. When I finally did visit, I was very careful to avoid having my photo taken. I made sure I kept my name out of the news.

For most women, it's not that easy. The psychologist Richard Gelles makes this point by saying to men, "Right now, leave your job. Leave your wallet, credit cards, everything on the desk. Take nothing but a one-way ticket to a strange town. Could you do that? And could you also take the children?"

Most of us don't even think of these problems. We assume, as I said a while ago, that the woman actually can leave and that leaving would make her safe. Statistics tell us that both assumptions are wrong. The truth is that many battered women are imprisoned in a physical, economic, and legal sense; many

are emotionally damaged in the same way political prisoners are damaged. Others simply have nowhere to go.

Friends are afraid to take them in - and rightly so. The largest number of women who are murdered in domestic violence are killed in the first ten days *after* leaving. Statistically, leaving is the single most dangerous thing a battered woman can do.

Here in the Roaring Fork Valley, Advocate Safehouse provides the only Safehouse Program in the Roaring Fork Valley and in Garfield County. It's one of only eleven safe houses on Colorado's western slope. Last year, Advocate Safehouse provided over 1,600 nights of safe shelter for 23 survivors and their 20 children. Since 1987 when Advocate Safehouse Project first started, they have provided more than 26,500 nights of shelter to 950 survivors and their 995 children.

Now let me ask you some questions we might ask instead of the Why Doesn't She Leave question:

- "Why should she be forced to leave her home?"
- "Why don't we question the logistics of warehousing the victims of domestic violence - that is, building shelters for all three million of them - rather than punishing the offenders?"
- Why is it that we will arrest a man for hitting another man on the street far more often than for hitting his wife? How can it be that the person he's sworn to love, honor, and cherish above all others weighs less on the scales of justice than a stranger on the street?

The answer to these questions is that it's much easier for us to imagine that there is something wrong with one individual here and there than to imagine that something is wrong with a whole society. In an address at the GA during which our UU resolution on violence against women was adopted in 1993, the Reverend Bobbie Groth said:

When I came to understand that social characteristics and dynamics are not random, but (that they) serve a function for a society and the way it is organized, I began to understand what is really necessary to change (the situation]. Our society maintains some very cherished and self-destructive illusions about gender, wealth and status. [These illusions] prevent us from examining and condemning the economic structures that makes actual individuals ... and males as a category ... benefit from violence. About 40 percent of males are *never* violent in their lives [and] the majority of all males are not chronically violent. But the violence of males persists almost unabated because all males... benefit from the social privileges violence enforces. *Few* males have used their privilege to fight violence. My experience is that conferences on domestic abuse and sexual abuse resound with the nearly complete absence of men. This is particularly significant in a society where all arenas of power are dominated by males.

I think that Julie Olson will probably confirm what Reverend Groth said about the absence of men in shelter work. Much has changed since 1993 – and much has not.

I think we UUs deserve a pat on the back for being willing to wrestle with this issue, and that Two Rivers deserves kudos for tackling the issue of violence in its many forms.

I have spoken about domestic violence in at least a dozen UU congregations and at General Assembly, and each time I have been asked a series of questions:

- Is this a proper topic to be discussing in church?
- How can we talk about this knowing that it will reopen old wounds in our congregation?
- And what can we do about such a huge problem anyway?

In closing, I want to answer those questions and tell you why we *must* talk about this problem. Violence against women is an *essential* ethical, social justice, and spiritual issue for us as UUs. It speaks to the heart of our faith and our principles. And there is no better place, perhaps no *other* place, where we can heal our wounds, change our lives, and begin to change the world around us.

There are those among us who don't want to talk about gender violence because they don't want to open old guilts and wounds. But can we really believe those wounds won't be opened away from this supporting community? You may avoid the topic for one hour on Sunday, but family violence is inescapable the other 167 hours of the week. Gender violence is like racism. It is within us and it is always among us.

We can close our eyes to its evil and its pain, but when we open them, it will still be there. Intimate violence is in our history, our laws, our customs, our religion –

all of the world's major religions -- and in our daily lives. Our silence won't change that.

Confronting our pain and the guilt we feel when we fall short of our ideals is the hardest work we can do, but it also the most rewarding. And there is a great deal that we *can* do, and most of it is already written between the lines of our GA Resolution on violence against women.

- We can educate ourselves.
- We can read bring speakers in from the community.
- We can learn what resources our community offers.
- We can raise hell when unjust laws or public policies perpetuate the problem.
- We can use our social action programs to provide volunteers and raise money for local shelters, as we will be doing this morning, when our collection plate will go to Advocate Safehouse.
- And finally, we can encourage healing by ministering to one another singly and in groups, and through art, music, ritual, and worship.

In a moment, we will pass the collection plate. While we do that, and during the special music that Lisa Dancing-Light has prepared for us, I invite you to join in a ritual that has been done in many UU churches. If you know someone who has been a victim of domestic violence – someone who has been assaulted physically or sexually by a family member or intimate partner – come up and light a candle for them. I will light the first candle, and motion for you to join me.

To end violence, we must bear witness to the principles of equality, justice, and the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. Unitarian Universalists have always been about this work, across the centuries and around the globe.

But before we can carry that work to the larger world, we must begin by practicing the details of our faith in the smallest places, close to home, the places too small to appear on any map. We must take the light from our chalice and use it to fill the dark, uncharted continents of our own hearts.

(NICOLETTE EXPLAINS RITUAL, LIGHTS FIRST CANDLE ON LISA’S CUE)

Offertory “Trilogy, Mother Earth Chant, The Promise Lisa Dancing-Light
Words & Music: Lisa Dancing-Light

Musical Meditation & Candle Lighting The Promise Lisa Dancing-Light
Words & Music: Lisa Dancing-Light

Marge Piercy

We must sit down and reason together.

We must sit down...

Perhaps we should sit in the dark.

In the dark we could utter our feelings...

In the dark we could not see who speaks

And only the words

Would say what they say.

No one would speak more than twice.

No one would speak less than once...

Perhaps we should start by speaking softly.

The woman must learn to dare to speak,

The men must learn to bother to listen.

The women must learn to say I think this is so.

The men must learn to stop dancing solos on the ceiling.

After each speaks, she or he

Will say a ritual phrase:

It is not I who speak but the wind.

Wind blows through me.

Long after me is the wind.

Chalice Extinguishing

Chris Coyle

-Elizabeth Selle Jones

CHRIS – ANNOUNCE HYMN, ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO GET COFFEE, THEN RECONVENE FOR A Q&A WITH JULIE OLSON.

+ Closing Hymn

"Bring Many Names"

Lisa Dancing-Light

-Words: Brian Wren; Music: Carlton R. Young