

JOURNEYS

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
Theme "Un-Pack It" for April 2017

A Community of **Risk**

Life will break you. Nobody can protect you from that, and living alone won't either, for solitude will also break you with its yearning. You have to love. You have to feel. It is the reason you are here on earth. You are here to risk your heart. You are here to be swallowed up. And when it happens that you are broken, or betrayed, or left, or hurt, or death brushes near, let yourself sit by an apple tree and listen to the apples falling all around you in heaps, wasting their sweetness. Tell yourself you tasted as many as you could.

~ Louise Erdrich

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WONDERINGS *on the theme of* RISK

Three months. Ninety days of taking chances. Over three thousand hours without the safety net of 'the usual.' Somehow, we survived. And, here we are, arriving back in a place that is both familiar and different...returning to what we know while at the same time knowing all kinds of stuff we didn't know before.

Did you enjoy your sabbatical? YOUR sabbatical, I mean...the one that offered you a break from the expected and familiar...the one that perhaps called on you to do/be something more...something out of your comfort zone?

During the past three months, we all took some risk. I know; risk is usually associated with the dare devils and thrill seekers, and perhaps we don't see ourselves in that way. Yet risks are presented to us every day in very ordinary ways. It is risky to step outside the lines. It is risky to sit with or live in the unfamiliar. It takes guts to try new things and put ourselves in vulnerable situations. Every time we make a commitment to something or someone, we are taking a risk. It can require courage just to talk with people we don't know, especially if they represent something different. Heck, just stepping off the curb can be dangerous!

As Janet Rand has been quoted, "The person who risks nothing...simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love – live." As I look back on my sabbatical, I realize it required risk. I took some big chances and walked into a few uncomfortable situations. I did things I have never done before. I will soon be publishing a sabbatical report in which I'll tell you about it.

RISK

The Latin word comes from a Greek navigation term – rhiza – which meant "root, stone, cut off from firm land."

But for now, let me say that while it cost a lot of money, caused some sleeplessness, put a big burden on UFP's leadership, and created some tensions, it resulted in, for me, gifts and lessons well worth the cost.

I trust that over these three months, you also were blessed with gifts and lessons that would not have come your way if it were not for the 'risk of sabbatical' that we took together.

I look forward to hearing your stories of the winter of 2017! Returning again in love,

~ Rev. Julie

risk /risk/

noun

1. a situation involving exposure to danger.
2. the possibility that something unpleasant or unwelcome will happen.
3. a person or thing regarded as likely to turn out well or badly in a particular context or respect.

verb

1. expose (someone or something valued) to danger, harm, or loss.
2. act or fail to act in such a way as to bring about the possibility of an unpleasant or unwelcome event.
3. incur the chance of unfortunate consequences by engaging in an action.

synonyms: chance, uncertainty, unpredictability, precariousness, instability, insecurity, perilousness; to endanger, imperil, jeopardize, hazard, or gamble with.



a STORY about RISK

Skydiving – Reflection by Doug Powell (excerpt)

Most of my 70-or-so jumps began the same way: A group of us, gearing up for the adventure, putting on heavy duty harnesses, parachute packs, altimeters, helmets, goggles, etc. Next, we load into the plane. We sit down, buckle up, and the plane starts moving. The airplane is abuzz with excitement, bravado and chatter as the engines roar, we leave the ground, and the scenery begins to recede in the window.



At some point the pilot turns and confides something to a nearby veteran who loudly yells “2 minutes!”, which a handful of voices echo. The plane wakes up, and starts buzzing with activity again. All of us are doing last minute gear-checks, planning exits, and getting “ready”.

And then someone goes to the back of the plane and slides open the plexi-glass door to the outside. The plane instantly fills with blustery wind and a hint of airplane exhaust.

This is the moment things get very real for people. It is the moment where you realize two things: 1) What you imagined this might be like has no relationship to what it is actually like, and 2) That you are committed. (Skydivers say: “When you get up to that door, ‘NO!’ sounds an awful lot like ‘GO!’”)

People start leaving the airplane, with the airplane literally “bouncing” like a diving board with each departure. Everyone then moves one notch closer to that door and all of its terrible unknown-ness.

Then the person in front of you ‘vanishes’, and it’s suddenly your turn. You enter the doorway, looking out into the incomprehensible vastness of the open sky, the wind buffeting you, and the ground looking less “high up”, and more simply unreal. “One!, Two, Three!”... and you are in freefall. Irrevocably committed.

There are a lot of things you could do at this point: Scream, howl, claw at the air, flap your arms, maybe turn to cast a longing glance back to the airplane. Sadly, none of them will really change your situation. As it turns out, the most aerodynamically stable body position in freefall is achieved through... relaxing. When you truly relax in freefall, your body naturally assumes the shape of an arch. Until you arch, you are unstable, control is difficult. After arching, it becomes stable, even graceful.

Nothing you are likely to imagine could have prepared you for this. For 60 seemingly eternal seconds, you are simply in the sky, bathed in wind, with no churning stomach, and no visual sense of velocity. A friend of mine described it as “looking straight into the eye of God”.

I suppose we can always howl, claw at the air, flap our arms – or we can take the more graceful path: accept, relax, arch, and appreciate the humbling beauty around, between, and within us. In every moment, this choice is ours.

<https://revgretchenhaley.wordpress.com/2014/02/03/skydiving-reflection-by-doug-powell/>

INSPIRATIONS *on* RISK

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing. He or she may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he or she simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love – live. Only a person who risks is free. ~ Janet Rand

Let's think about [the risk of] love. Waking up every day and loving someone who may or may not love us back, whose safety we can't ensure, who may stay in our lives or may leave without a moment's notice, who may be loyal to the day they die or betray us tomorrow – that's vulnerability. ~ Brené Brown

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable. ~ C.S. Lewis

Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go. ~ T. S. Eliot

I love the recklessness of faith. First you leap, and then you grow wings. ~ Rev. William Sloane Coffin

When we walk to the edge of all the light we know, and step out into the darkness of the unknown, one of two things will happen: there will be something solid for us to stand on ... or we will learn to fly. ~ Anonymous

And in all this continual risking, the most profound courage may be found in the simple willingness to allow ourselves to be happy along the way. ~ David Whyte

A sheltered life can be a daring life as well. For all serious daring starts from within. ~ Eudora Welty

A ship in harbor is safe – but that is not what ships are for. ~ John A. Shedd

If you are not willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary. ~ Jim Rohn

If the risk is fully aligned with your purpose and mission, then it's worth considering. ~ Peter Diamandis

The only way to find true happiness is to risk being completely cut open. ~ Chuck Palahniuk

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. ~ Elizabeth Appell

You keep [your 'risk muscle'] in shape by trying new things. If you don't, it atrophies. Make a point of using it at least once a day. ~ Roger von Oech

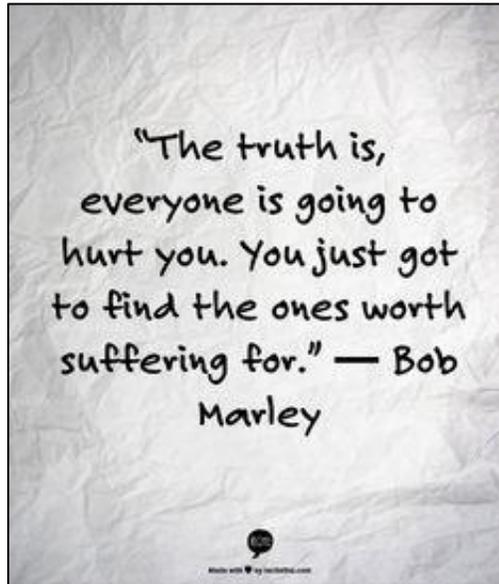
No man is worth his salt who is not ready at all times to risk his well-being, to risk his body, to risk his life, in a great cause. ~ Theodore Roosevelt

The most difficult thing in the world is to reveal yourself, to express what you have to. As an artist, I feel that we must try many things - but above all we must dare to fail. You must be willing to risk everything to really express it all. ~ John Cassavetes

It is rare indeed that people give. Most people guard and keep; they suppose that it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping, whereas what they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be. One can give nothing whatever without giving oneself--that is to say, risking oneself. If one cannot risk oneself, then one is simply incapable of giving. ~ James Baldwin

The risk I took was calculated. But, man, am I bad at math! ~ Anonymous

Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now. ~ Goethe



PRACTICING RISK

Option A: Risk Letting Your Counter-Cultural Self Loose

Each of us has counter-cultural commitments that we don't lean into as fully as we wish. It's risky to be labeled "a radical." And so...we downplay our pacifism. We don't make a big deal out of our veganism. In order not to be seen as the "weird parents," we've given up on those "silly" efforts to limit TV, put phones away at dinner, or just not buy cable at all. Our closest friends don't really understand what UUism is because we don't want people to think we're "evangelical." We deeply believe in racial reparations but we rarely mention it because the backlash leaves us not only angry but with an even more devastating sense of mourning and isolation.

It's not simple. But not letting our counter-cultural self loose comes at a cost. This month take the risk of letting it all hang out, or hang out to the degree that feels right to you. Maybe it's wearing your Pride Parade t-shirt to the gym. Maybe it's inviting your friends over for a vegan dinner, or even a vegan dinner where you say a UU grace and discuss the merits of proportional representation (maybe that's a bit overboard, but you get the point.) Or how about asking a friend to come to Fellowship--not to recruit them, but just so they get a better sense of this piece of your life. Or maybe it's time for you to let your friends know you vote Conservative and why.

Journal, or talk with friends, about the cost of "letting loose." Be sure to also note how the results may have out-weighed the price.

Option B: Figure Out Your Edge

The Edge Is Where I Want To Be, a poem by Lisa Martinovic, pulls no punches. It's audacious, urgent, impatient, even pushy. Simply put, Martinovic wants us out of the dangerous middle, or "the uncooked vanilla pudding of life," as she puts it. She wants us to run as soon as possible to "the edge," where true living lies.

But what's your edge? That also is what the poem is all about. Don't just run to the edge; figure out which edge is yours.

If you're ready for that challenge, then here are your instructions:

1. Read Martinovic's poem: <http://slaminatrix.com/the-edge-is-where-i-want-to-be>
2. Ask yourself, "What's the message in there for me?" (And write down your thoughts)
3. Later (a minute, a day, a week), read the poem again
4. Ask yourself, "What's the message in there for me?" (And write down your thoughts)
5. Have a friend read Martinovic's poem to you.
6. Ask yourself, "What's the message in there for me?" (And write down your thoughts)

After three different "hearings," some of the fog should be lifted. That edge of yours should be a bit more clear. Figure out a few steps to get yourself closer, along with a plan for how to take those steps.



Option C: Resist Standing Up and Risk Sitting Down

"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."
~ Winston Churchill

Winston Churchill's words are indeed a celebration of the "quieter" acts of courage. Yes, the more assertive risks get most of the attention: speaking up, defending, pushing back, demanding your voice be heard. And yet, sometimes speaking up is simply a way to avoid courageously listening to the other side. Sometimes putting yourself on the line to "change them" is just a way to avoid them changing you. Or a tragic missed opportunity to grow. Yes, we should urge each other to "bravely keep going" and "courageously take control." There are times when what's most needed is the risk of just sitting with unknowing.

And so, here's what this spiritual assignment invites us to do:

Find three opportunities to "sit down and listen"
when your first instinct is to "stand up and speak."

Yes, that's NOT going to be easy. But it will be worth the risk!

Share with others...not only what it was like to try to listen better, but also (and maybe more importantly) what it was like to better monitor (and understand) your instinct to stand up and speak.

QUESTIONS for reflection on RISK

- Are your commitments deep and big enough to put you in danger?
(To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. ~James Baldwin)
- Who near you is taking a risk and needs reminding that others are watching with admiration and awe? Who needs help seeing that they aren't simply exposed, but radiant?
(What makes you vulnerable, makes you beautiful. ~ Brené Brown)
- How breakable is that heart of yours? Is it more "carefully wrapped" than you noticed?
What one small risk this month might help it get some "air"? (See C.S. Lewis quote on page 4.)
- What might change in your relationship(s) if you took the time to remember that you've "found one worth suffering for"? *(The truth is, everyone is going to hurt you. You just got to find the ones worth suffering for. ~ Bob Marley)*
- Have the adventures gotten a bit out of hand? Is there a bit too much "living boldly" going on for you right now? What would you risk by saying 'no' to some adventures?
- Are you scared? And if so, are you able to tell someone?
- When was the last time you referred to life using the phrase: "The thrill of it all?" Where is there room this month to make life a bit more thrilling?
- What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find your question.



Resources on RISK

On the Web

Courage & Risking Everything To Do The Right Thing - What does it mean to be courageous? Is it an automatic response or a conscious choice? TED speakers examine the nature of courage and what it takes to risk everything to do the right thing.

<http://tinyurl.com/l64z2m6>

Toxic, Risk, Danger... Creativity - An exploration of why creative people sometimes put themselves at risk: dancers dive through glass, a sculptor constructs a tornado of fire and an injured trumpeter tries to get back his chops.

<http://tinyurl.com/mcsjxzc>

Walking Together - A high school student takes a risk to make a friend.

<https://themoth.org/stories/walking-together>

Raising our Girls to be Perfect and Our Boys to be Brave - TED Talk ~ Reshma Saujani

<http://tinyurl.com/z4swsuy>

Addicted to Risk - TED Talk ~ Naomi Klein

We have become far too willing to gamble with things that are precious and irreplaceable.

<http://tinyurl.com/m3gz839>

Why Teens Are Impulsive, Addiction-Prone and Should Protect Their Brains

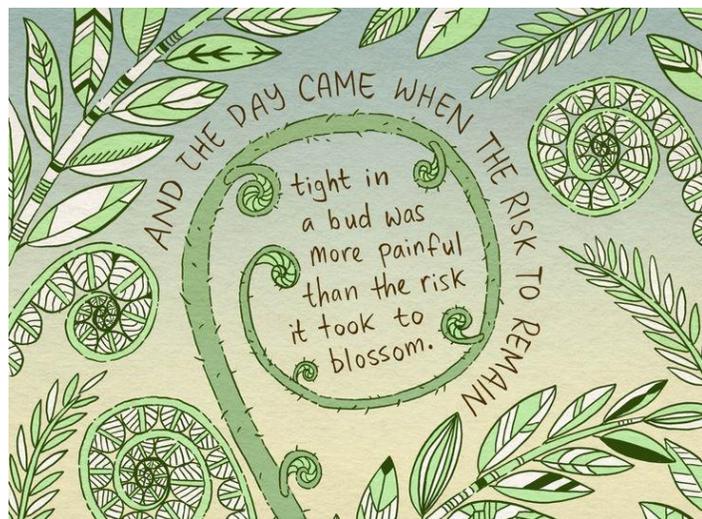
Why taking risk is essential for brain development.

<http://tinyurl.com/gtzpfou>

Risky Play: Why Children Love It and Need It

~ Peter Gray Ph.D. - To protect our children we must allow them to play in ways deemed "risky."

<http://tinyurl.com/ph8lap7>



Confessions of an Amateur Tightrope Walker

"These recklessly, riotously brave people do us all a service: There is so much optimism and hope in their daring. They show us that, with practice, even the most improbable things become possible."

<http://tinyurl.com/m4wvjx3>

The Warrior Tradition: Conquering Fear

~ Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche - "Doubt is the first obstacle to fearlessness that has to be overcome... The heart of the warrior is basic aliveness or basic goodness. Such fearless goodness is free from doubt." <http://tinyurl.com/kbqpw05>

Stay Safe or Risk Opening Your Heart? ~ Teresa Graham Brett - "When [my children] came into my life, the skills I learned in childhood no longer worked. My children... opened my heart and my soul... They forced me to call into question everything [about boundaries, safety and hiding] that had served me well (or so I thought) until that point in my life..." <http://tinyurl.com/7krdxdh>

On the Path to Competence ~ Susan Leem - "The scariest part of learning a new skill is taking what you've learned in a purely theoretical setting, and then applying it to worldly problems. You can see the safety net erode..." <http://tinyurl.com/krc974x>

Scientists Can Now Watch the Brain Evaluate Risk ~ Ed Young - "The study reveals something about how we make decisions and where our attitudes toward risk come from. It's not about what we gain from winning, but about how we deal with losing." <http://tinyurl.com/z9s45a3>

Showing Up Whole, Despite All the Risks

~ Courtney E. Martin - "In a world where we are crafting our identities more conscientiously than ever before... it takes a certain kind of modern courage to stop crafting. To say, enough with the curation. Enough with the control. I'm just going to be myself - warts and all..."

<http://tinyurl.com/h3h2az8>

On Vulnerability ~ Richard Rohr - "It is a risky position to live undefended, in a kind of constant openness to the other - because it means others could sometimes actually wound us... But only if we take this risk do we also allow the opposite possibility: the other might also gift us, free us, and even love us." <http://tinyurl.com/m8wudqc>



5 Parkour Concepts for Healthy Aging ~ Ben Musholt - Decreasing physical risk as adults leads to extreme bodily risk as we age.

<http://tinyurl.com/mj587uk>

The Risks We Take ~ Daniel Gregoire - "It was...a choice of how to get home...untrodden paths might challenge me, reveal my inexperience, my biases, and expose the soft underbelly of my vulnerable, human self." <http://tinyurl.com/kr35aex>

Embracing the Dangerous and Sacred ~ Suzie Spangenberg - "If we don't stretch ourselves we become disconnected from our humanity. Spirit is about breaking open our hearts and minds and embracing all that life holds--not just the safe and sacred, but also the dangerous and sacred."

<http://tinyurl.com/k8bm62a>

How Big Our Brave Is ~ Gretchen Haley - "What gives someone the courage to do something so bold and yet so necessary? What allows us to risk ourselves for the sake of liberation - our own, and others'?" <http://tinyurl.com/l3yudml>

Movies

All the President's Men (1976/PG) Reporters uncover the details of the Watergate scandal that leads to President Richard Nixon's resignation.

Documented (2013/Doc) Jose Antonio Vargas was brought to the US from the Philippines when he was 12. He eventually became a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, all while hiding his 'illegal' status. Finally, in 2011, he took the risk of coming out as an undocumented immigrant.

Finding Forrester (2000/PG13) A young prodigy befriends a reclusive writer, and their friendship leads them to take personal risks.

Fire at Sea (2016/Doc) A heart-rending documentary about a small island between Libya and Sicily where illegal immigrants from Africa stop on their way to Europe.

Freelancer on the Front Lines (2016/Doc NFB) Tough enough to report on the Middle East all the while having to dodge bullets and rockets, but Jesse Rosenfeld's task is made tougher still by the fact that he is a freelancer who must constantly find a buyer for his work. <http://tinyurl.com/mnt4nll>

Meru (2015/Doc) An emotionally moving documentary about why three men attempt to climb one of the most challenging mountains in the world.

Man On Wire (2008/Doc) In 1974, a young French man stepped out on a wire suspended between the Twin Towers. He danced on this wire with no safety net before being arrested for what has come to be known as the "artistic crime of the century."

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939/NR) The plans of a man is appointed to fill a vacancy in the US Senate promptly collide with political corruption, but he doesn't back down.

October Sky (1999, PG) The story a coal miner's son who was inspired by the first Sputnik launch to take up rocketry against his father's wishes.

Risky Business (1983/R) A Chicago teenager is looking for fun at home while his parents are away, but the situation quickly gets out of hand.

Rogue Trader (1999/R) The story of an investment broker who singlehandedly bankrupted one of the oldest and most important banks in Britain.

Safety Not Guaranteed (2012/R) What happens if we fight too hard against the risk of future disappointment?

Schindler's List (1993/R) In German-occupied Poland during WWII, Schindler becomes concerned for his Jewish workforce after witnessing their persecution by the Nazi Germans.

The Crucible (1996/PG13) A Salem resident attempts to frame her ex-lover's wife for being a witch in the middle of the 1692 witchcraft trials.

Table Grace on RISK

Make Homage to the Farmer and the Seed

Every farmer who plants a seed takes a risk.

We work through faith that the good deeds
we do are to put down roots.

The roots are invisible, but they sustain plants
that may not give fruit for a while.

How lovely is this planting the seeds of love.

~ Omid Safi



Books

A Feminist Ethic of Risk by Sharon Welch
Proposes a new life orientation for social justice while directly addressing "middle-class despair" over issues and challenges seemingly too large to tackle, such as environmental destruction and racism. Welch's ethic uproots classical assumptions and opens up the possibility of a strong religious vision or "theology of resistance and hope."

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead by Brené Brown - Based on twelve years of research, Dr. Brené Brown dispels the cultural myth that vulnerability is weakness and argues that it is, in truth, our most accurate measure of courage. A celebration and affirmation of the risk of vulnerability.

Night Running: A Book of Essays about Breaking Through - Emphasizing female voices, this collection of eleven personal essays takes in the sights and sounds and smells of real life, of real risk, of real pain and of real elation. Set in different countries around the world, it offers a deep but accessible look at the power of running to make us feel more and to see ourselves in a new light.

Out of the Flames: The Remarkable Story of a Fearless Scholar, a Fatal Heresy, and One of the Rarest Books in the World by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone - Unitarian Michael Servetus is a hidden figurehead of history who is remembered not for his name, but for the revolutionary deeds that stand in his place. Servetus is credited with the discovery of pulmonary circulation in the human body as well as the authorship of a polemical masterpiece that cost him his life.

The Courage to Be by Paul Tillich - Originally published more than fifty years ago, this has become a classic of 10th century religious and philosophical thought. This great Christian existentialist thinker describes the dilemma of modern human beings, pointing a way to the conquest of the problem of anxiety by finding the "courage to be" in spite of life's threats to our non-being (eg: anxiety, meaninglessness, death, fear)

The Exquisite Risk: Daring to Live an Authentic Life by Mark Nepo - "In these fast-paced times, the exquisite risk facing each of us every day is to slow down and "still our own house" so that we may experience life rather than simply manage it. Nepo shares his battle with illness that helped him understand how only by daring to embrace all that life has to offer can we come to a deeper appreciation of its meaning and beauty.

Music

Brave by Sarah Bareilles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUQsqBqxoR4>

Courage Of Your Convictions by The Hollies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEG0mzUVFmA>

Courage - The Whitest Boy Alive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nh0fuyDhKZg>

I Won't Back Down

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvITjrNJ51A>

Johnny Cash:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUQCmDfKFac>

Take a Chance On Me by Abba

<http://tinyurl.com/dxc6yep>

Take a Chance On Love by Ella Fitzgerald

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrnDYriNH5A>

Tightrope by Janelle Monáe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwnefUaKCbc>

Try Everything by Shakira

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nX5gd4GXcv0>

Children's Books *on* RISK

A Sweet Smell of Roses by Angela Johnson
Chester the Brave by Audrey Penn
Don't Be Afraid, Little Pip by Karma Wilson
Emmanuel's Dream by Laurie Ann Thompson
Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae [Video](#)
If I Never Forever Endeavor by Holly Meade
Night Boat to Freedom by Margot Theis Raven
Peep by Kevin Luthardt
Shortcut by Donald Crews
The Dark by Lemony Snicket [Video](#)
The Dot by Peter Reynolds
The Empty Pot by Demi
The Man Who Walked Between the Towers by Mordicai Gerstein
The Way Back Home by Oliver Jeffers
Whispering Town by Jennifer Elvgren



We subscribe to "Soul Matters," a curriculum from the Congregational Life Office of the UUA. Service Leaders and Covenant Group Facilitators work with Rev. Julie to incorporate each monthly theme into our programming & Sunday Services. Thanks to all who help create these packets by writing text, suggesting resources, offering artwork and providing feedback!

May's theme: **UNFOLDING**

In May, we will consider what it means to be a community of "unfolding." What wants to be born? What is coming into being?

Do you have ideas for resources? A favourite novel, blog, poem, or movie? Maybe you've taken a photo or done some artwork for the front page? Email your suggestions to office@peterboroughunitarian.ca

Chalice Lighting *on* RISK

~ Ma Theresa Gustilo Gallardo,
with adaptation

We cast not our eyes below, we say to ourselves we are how we came, wounded from struggles and risks, triumphant in our survival, entitled by birthright to belong to this the only humankind there is, saying we are included, we belong, we are here, and we will be and do. We will breathe joy into a desolation. We will breathe peace into conflict. We will breathe life into destruction. We will breathe boldness into fear. We will be the earth we wish to see. We are growth, and hope, and courage, and glee.

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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