



# The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist  
Fellowship of Waynesboro

## Prepare to be Changed

By Annie Foerster

When was the last time you read a book that changed your life—changed your world view, your mind, your very soul?

Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, is a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology. She is also an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. And, maybe more importantly, she is a storyteller. The subtitle of her book is *Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Again, it's the third element of the trilogy that makes her stories life-changing.

Let's start with the stories—the creation stories if you will. This one you know, from the Hebrew Bible; from Genesis. *And God created the Heavens and the Earth; He created the plants and the animals; and, lastly, He created Man and gave him dominion over all the Earth.* You don't have to believe the story literally to be affected by it. If you were raised in this society, subconsciously you believe that human beings have dominion over all the Earth. And look what we've done with it.

The Potawatomi creation story begins like this: *In the beginning there was the Skyworld.* It continues with a hole in the sky and a woman falling through the hole.

*She fell like a maple seed, pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from the hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been before. . . . Hurtling downward, she saw only dark water below. But in that emptiness*

*in the beam. As it grew closer, they could see that it was a woman, arms outstretched, . . . The geese nodded at one another and rose together from the water in a wave of goose music. She felt the beat of their wings as they flew beneath her to break her fall. Far from the only home she'd ever known, she caught her breath at the warm embrace of soft feathers as they gently carried her downward. And so it began.*

The story goes on, explaining how the animals dived into the water where they all lived to bring up mud to create a dry land for the woman to stand. They put it on the back of a large turtle. Moved by the generosity of their gift, the woman, now known as Skywoman, began to sing her gratitude and then to dance. Her feet, caressing the new earth, caused it to swell and grow. The story continues.

*Like any good guest, Skywoman had not come empty-handed. The bundle she clutched in her hand came from the Tree of Life, which she had grabbed when she fell through the hole in the Skyworld. It included branches—fruits and seeds of all kinds of plants. These she scattered on the ground until the world turned from brown to green. . . . And now the animals had plenty to eat.*

Skywoman also brought a seed in her belly and soon there were more like her. And because the animals were there before her, she watched and learned from them how to live in this world. She and her children watched the plants as they grew and learned from them as well. They continued to show gratitude for the gifts of their new home Earth and together, in reciprocity—

humans, animals and plants together—they made the world a better place.

If your culture believes that creation story, your relationship with the Earth is much different than those who know only the Genesis story. The results are greatly different as well. And thus the lessons unfold.

Kimmerer uses her scientific training in companionship with her culture’s worldview (Earthview, if you will) to show how the predominant Genesis culture brought the world to the existing disaster of Climate Change. But she doesn’t blame and she doesn’t scold. She doesn’t demand that we simply stop what we’re doing. Instead she lays out a plan for *healing* the Earth *and ourselves*, a plan that includes gratitude, healing and reciprocity.

*You don’t show your love and care, she writes, by putting what you love behind a fence. You have to be involved. You have to contribute to the well-being of the world.*

Is it a coincidence or fate that Rev. Paul preached about Indigenous People’s Day this month and told us to open our eyes to Native American wisdom?

After reading this charming, mind-bending, accessible book, I would like to see it made mandatory reading for *everybody*. But since I can’t make that happen, here is my alternative suggestion: *That we (UUFW) read it together and then join one another to discuss it this winter to start the healing in our own back yards next spring.* The library has copies. So does Amazon. Whether you buy or borrow it, will you join me during the first week of November to begin a Sweetgrass revolution? I’ll let you know the dates and time. Let me know if you are interested ([redseamripper@gmail.com](mailto:redseamripper@gmail.com)). And, be prepared to be changed.

## Support for Our Parents

By Sarah Skaar

Last Sunday the UUFW monthly parent’s discussion group kicked off with a visit from Waynesboro potter, Susan Stone (owner of Muddigs Studio). She led parents in making clay chalices using hand-building methods. Ann Majure and nursery coordinator, Stephanie Taylor, provided childcare.



We discussed our group agreements for creating a sacred space that encourages support and sharing. On the first Sunday of each month this group meets to share lunch, discussion and camaraderie about the highs and lows of parenting.

Next month, two UUFW parents will head to Pilot, Virginia to become trained to facilitate the “Our Whole Lives” class (OWL) for youth in grades 7-12. We are excited to be able to support the learning of both parents and youth and to provide ways for them to enhance the community with greater knowledge, while deepening their commitment to Unitarian Universalism.

