



The CommUUnicator

**Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of Waynesboro**

My Journey

By Pat Ward

In 2016 (two days after THAT election), I had a spinal cord stroke. I thought I was healthy—I was eating vegan, losing weight, blood pressure normal, hiking in Ramsay's Draft that week. Stroke was not diagnosed for a week, hence I ended up not being able to stand or walk. The Old Farts Construction Company from UUFW (Harouff, Sherwood, Patterson brothers, Huston) made my house accessible and built out my front porch with a ramp. For three years, UUFW volunteers took me to various therapies including a stint at Wilson Rehab as outpatient. It took me that long to figure out how to acquire a car that could transport my wheelchair. I could not find any support groups through the rehab center, my neurologist, nothing. And I knew nothing. A lot of time was lost in ignorance.

Then one day I was confiding to my urologist how much I missed kayaking, and she said, "I just taught a woman who is in a wheelchair how to pee while in a kayak. She was going on a trip into the wilderness." I said that I wanted to meet this woman and later was able to call and speak with her. In the meantime, I was doing an adaptive ski program at Wintergreen, where you had an hour of physical therapy, and then skied. It was a thrill to be able to do something that I used to enjoy so much. Wintergreen has a huge adaptive program.

Fast forward to 2025. The kayaking woman is my best friend. In 2023, she started a group called OAR (Outdoor Adaptive Recreation), and we have around two dozen members who regularly get outdoors together. We have kayaked, water skied, tubed, surfed, explored trails, hand cycled, pickle balled and many other activities. I have discovered the world of adaptive sports. There is a wheelchair basketball team in Harrisonburg. I have friends that play on it.

Two years ago, two women and I camped across the country to Redwood National Park. One was the woman who founded OAR, and another was an able-bodied woman in her 70's, who had a small camper. I found a cot with a tent attached to the top so it was more wheelchair height, and that is what I used for a month. I also used it the next year on a trip to Florida with the same friend to kayak with the manatees and find amazing birds.

I feel so lucky to have all these friends that I can just be myself with and talk about equipment and health issues common with spinal cord injuries. There is also a neuro support group at Augusta Health now, which is very good.

I have four different types of wheelchairs, and I use all of them. There is a place, [All Blessings Flow](#), in Charlottesville, where you can get power wheelchairs free. It took me

years to find it, and I am surprised that so few people know about it.

My life has been enriched by my situation. I have friends that I love, and I have been able to do things through adaptive sports that I could not do in my 70s as an able-bodied person.

My challenges currently are to be able to do more birding with the local groups and to test more local hiking trails to see if making some small improvements would make them accessible. And I have in mind to find a used van that is wheelchair accessible so as to be able to drive up into the woods with a power chair, which would be an advantage. When I find myself down in the dumps over something I can't do, I start thinking of the new friends I have in my life and of all the fun things I can look forward to these days.



Pat with UUFW friends on a recent outing to the White Oak Lavender Farm near Harrisonburg.

See you Later, Alligator! (This is not a good-bye story, but it is a pitch!)

By Laura Riggan, RE Team Leader
In Chalice House, hanging to the left of the fireplace, is an old photograph of children

from a UUFW RE class. They are lined up one in front of the other on a plastic rocking toy. I think the toy is supposed to be an alligator.



I thought of the photo the other day when I saw the rocking alligator toy out on our playground. One of our current RE scholars, age 3, pointed out that it is broken. The seat is cracked in a couple of places. Pfft. Always hesitant to throw away things that might still be functional, I thought, a little crack in the seat isn't a big deal.

But let's face it—those cracks are going to pinch or scrape someone's backside, and it's time to retire the rocking alligator thing. Its best days are over; its kids are grown and gone.

The children in the photograph were quite young—I would guess 4-6. I knew them then, and I am still in touch with four of the six, as they have recently come through my high school classroom. As mentioned, they are grown now, two rising college sophomores and two rising seniors in high school. I don't know where the other two children in that photo are. None of the six remained active at



UUFW long enough to bridge when they graduated from high school.

Sometimes it's hard to recognize what we foster in our youngest members. We don't often get to see them when they're grown. Teenage priorities, college classes, family, travel sports, jobs—that is, life—very often leads them away from UUFW as they grow.

I don't know all the children who have been influenced by the love and leadership of UUFW grownups—or even all those from the 16 years I have been a member here. But I run into some of them frequently enough—or follow their parents on social media—to be able to report good things: they are engineers, nurses, vets, bartenders, community organizers, cooks, environmentalists, students, teachers, travelers, parents; they love animals, cooking, sports, nature, video games, music... They came from all walks of life, and they have endured all kinds of challenges in addition to their successes.

The brief time we have while these children are with us to touch their lives, and for our own lives and community to be touched by them, is powerful. I don't know how many of the young adults I have mentioned above are active UUs right now, but I know they took the values we shared out into the world. I know RE matters. I know that RE teachers and volunteers have impact far beyond the hour or so they might spend with our youngest community members every few weeks.

Assuming the alligator rocking toy is as old as the children, it's at least 19. While it may be destined for retirement, that's not true of our RE responsibilities. Like the new playground in our front yard, we need to be here for a new generation of youngsters. We'd love your help, as a volunteer or an RE Team member, to foster the values that will turn our youngest members into the fabulous adults—and just

maybe, grown up UUs—that their predecessors have become.

Member News

Our Fellowship has nine new members! Following the "New to UU" class on May 31, all of the attendees signed the book. Our new members are Sarah Smallwood, Jean Fraser, Silvia and Tom Gederberg, Bonnie Fritz, Sarah Fritz, David Lista, Catherine (Cat) and Dwight Wilson. Look for their profiles in upcoming issues of this newsletter, and make a point to get to know them.

Carla Throckmorton was involved in an accident that totaled her car and left her with injuries to her shoulder and ankle. She is healing well and hopes to return to her usual routine in a couple of weeks.



Social Justice Team member, Cynthia Thompson joined Lou Branham, assistant chief of the Monacan Indian Nation (MIN) at their 32nd annual Pow Wow. The SJ Team continues to build an allyship between the UUFW and the MIN.