



The CommUUnicator

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

Small World Connections

By George Thompson

In my work as a publisher and publishing consultant, whenever I meet someone for the first time—notably a faculty member, graduate student, and possibly a prospective author—I always ask if we can begin by getting to know each other a little bit before focusing on the work or task at hand. Often I get a puzzled look, as if to ask, “What does this have to do with anything?”

So I explain that my publishing career has always involved the importance and interpretation of place and I find it helpful to know where a person is from—specifically where they were born and raised and educated and what they did before arriving at this point in their professional life. When I see their expression soften and turn toward interest if not intrigue, I suggest that there’s often a good chance of an unexpected small world connection, even when one might assume there being none.

A few years ago, I met a young faculty member who couldn’t disguise his immediate reaction to this entreaty by laughing as politely as he could at the prospect of there being a small world connection between us. But he obliged and shared that he was from Nigeria: born, raised, and educated there. He then proceeded to say that he came to the U.S. to advance his career by earning a Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University, which allowed me to respond in kind by saying that my publishing career began in Baltimore, in 1984 before he was born, at the Johns Hopkins University Press. That got a big smile rather than

a dismissive laugh when I said, “See? Small world connection.” All of a sudden, I could sense an element of trust that did not earlier exist, and this allowed me to delve more fully into the motivations and purpose of his research, which I have found are fundamental to understanding and achieving a publishing outcome.

I am certain that all of us have had many similar occurrences when we meet someone for the first time and wonder, “How is it possible that we would have such a connection?” Sometimes that person becomes our lifelong partner! This kind of connection often happens at UUFW, when we introduce ourselves to guests and visitors following a service during coffee hour and find out that we are from the same geographical area or even city and have overlapping interests or work experiences. The circle of life becomes manifest in a genuine effort of “welcoming” and finding common ground, even when one may not expect it.

Recently, I was reading the weekly newspaper, *The Arthur Enterprise*, from Arthur, Nebraska (pop. 128), where the non-profit educational organization that I founded in 1990 and still direct—The Center for the Study of Place—has had a small library and retreat for some thirty years. The nearest town from Arthur in any direction is Hyannis, 34 miles to the north. This is remote cattle ranching country, among the nation’s best; this is also true cowboy culture, with deep roots back to the 1880s in the incredibly beautiful but fragile Sand Hills. (The

Sand Hills is a vast region, half the size of Virginia at 19,600 square miles, and fewer than 5,000 people live there. One county alone is bigger than the states of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined.)

So, when reading the paper I came across a small world connection that truly stopped me in my tracks and which I shared straight away with Michelle Simpson, the third-generation publisher of the family-owned paper:

“Hey, Michelle. Just read the announcement of the upcoming wedding of Luke Brumback and Sheridan Wilson and was amazed to read that Luke is originally from White Post, Virginia, and his parents are from White Post and Berryville, the next town to the north, about ten away. White Post is where George Washington began his career as a land surveyor when the Shenandoah Valley was “wilderness” back in 1748-1750. And Cynthia and I lived for five years near Berryville in a restored historic one-room schoolhouse (ca. 1800) with an addition (living room, bedroom, and bath) on the 180-acre Rolling Hills Farm (where the owner raised beef cattle) by historic Locksley Mill along the Shenandoah River. What a coincidence! If you are able to share this connection with Luke and Sheridan, that would be fabulous. And, also, they are getting married on August 29, Cynthia’s birthday!”

Michelle responded that she immediately shared this connection with Luke and Sheridan, whom Cynthia and I do not know, and then she shared her own amazing small world connection involving her 82-year-old dad that just happened to their mutual amazement. Like so many of you, my life has been littered with such small world connections, connections that often feel like blessings and even providential rather than coincidental or circumstantial, and I always feel

and give grateful thanks to the Universe when these situations arise.

This sentiment aligns with the following observation near the end of a truly magnificent new novel about Lakota and American life by Kent Nerburn entitled “Lone Dog Road” whose setting is on the Pine Ridge Reservation, about 2.5 hours north of Arthur: “Still, there’s coincidences and there’s coincidences. Sometimes things just seem like messages.”

Let our UUFW forever be a “welcoming” congregation that is built on such countless small world connections and a grounding in gratitude and generosity and the principles we hold dear as individuals and as a congregation.

Buildings and Grounds News

By Clint Nicely, Team Leader

Yes, the lawn on the south side of the Fellowship Hall facing 14th Street does indeed look a bit unsightly at the moment. The ground is uneven, and some of the roots from the unruly shrubs and trees, which were removed, are still exposed. But please have faith and confidence that a two-phase plan for a redesign and renovation is now underway. The garden design and the plant selections have all been determined by professional landscape and nursery experts. In the not-too-distant future, we will be offering the opportunity for you to adopt, sponsor, or memorialize one or more plants from a list agreed upon by the Garden Committee and the B&G team. Please do not purchase plants on your own, but allow our professionals to buy the plants you select, thus allowing consistency in type, size, and quality, etc. As we proceed, we will be offering more updates on our progress and on opportunities for members to be involved. Let me know if you have any questions at grounds@uufw.org.

