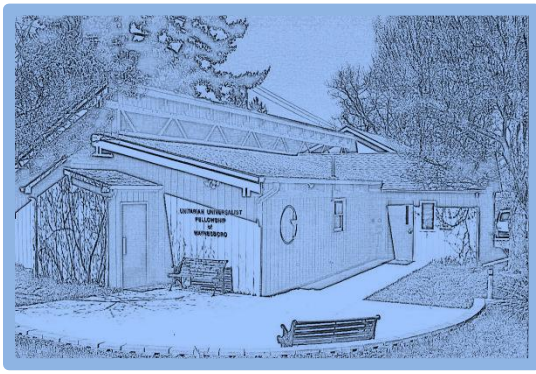


The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waynesboro

Permission to Grieve

By JeKaren Bell

I became a death doula to companion people in their grief. That was the calling I trained for. I did not expect how many calls would come on behalf of a dog, a cat, a horse, an iguana.

The first time someone called about a dying cat, I almost said that wasn't my work. I caught myself. She was not asking me to save the cat. She was asking me to help her hold what was coming, the same way I would help her hold the death of a parent. So I said yes. And I kept saying yes.

Companion animal grief gets little room in our culture. People apologize before they finish describing their loss. They say "I know it's just a dog" or "I feel silly grieving this much." They believe that this love counts less; that this grief should stay small and be managed alone.

I've sat with a man who could not wash the blanket his dog died on, the smell his last thread to twelve years of companionship. I've held space for someone grieving an iguana, an animal most people would not think to grieve at all. That grief moved through her the way grief moves through anyone who has lost a being who relied on them completely and loved them without condition.

Grief does not measure itself by species. It measures itself by the bond that has been broken. A companion animal knows us unguarded and unwell, and chooses to stay with us through it all. When that attachment ends, the absence is not smaller because the body was smaller.

We're rarely taught to anticipate losing an animal we love, even though most of us who share our lives with them will witness their death. There is no cultural script, no permission slip that says this loss deserves full mourning. People improvise alone, apologizing for tears at their desk.

This ministry allows me to hand people that permission slip: their grief is not too much, not silly, not something to minimize. I help them build a farewell ceremony, write a memorial blessing, or sit with a dying animal so neither faces that threshold alone. Every loss I have witnessed–fur, feathers, or scales–has been real, and worthy of honor and care.

Published September 23 in the UUA website's weekly inspiration section, Braver/Wiser.

UUFW 'Hallow-Read' was a Big Success

This year, our Halloween team distributed books as well as candy in the UUFW's first "Hallow-Read." The Chalice House grounds were transformed into a spooky scene with floating candles, skeletons and spiders, and the Grim Reaper prowling a haunted garden.

Dozens of books were collected earlier this fall by the RE team and contributed by Fellowship members, ranging from board books for babies to chapter books for teens. Excited trick-or-treaters got to choose a book

for their reading level as well as their favorite candies. Several parents expressed appreciation for the Fellowship's support of reading and noted that they'd never seen anything like it.



Kudos to our director of religious education, Shannon Mills, for organizing this creative and meaningful way to support our youngest community members and thanks to volunteers Clint and Donna Nicely, Chad Mills, Erin Milnes, Chuck and Duncan Guest, and Carla Throckmorton for making it happen!

Baby books and chapter books were



especially popular and ran out before the night was over, so the team plans to begin collecting early for next year's Hallow-Read. And Erin Milnes, our Curator of Creepy, envisions an even more chilling haunted garden, which will require early planning. Contact dre@uufw.org if you'd like to help next year. It's tons of fun!

New Art Show at UUFW

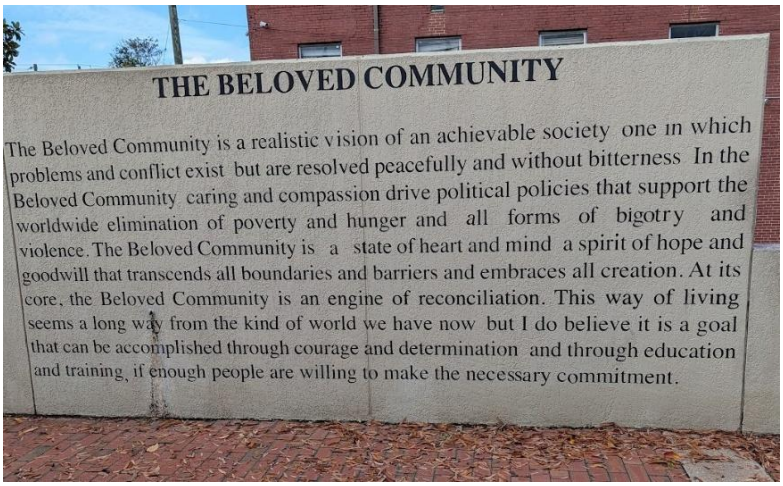
By Maribeth Nolde

Our last art show for 2026 features Jean St. Clair, a UUFW member and Board president, who is presenting her quilted masterpieces. "My Quilting Journey" will grace the walls of our Fellowship Hall until January 3rd, 2027.

Jean started sewing at age eight and began this journey making garments and then her own kids' clothes, including alterations to her daughter's wedding dress. She was always interested in quilting but had no time to learn how until she retired from teaching. She became hooked after taking a course.



Jean is drawn to the precision of quilting and how color choices really change the overall design. She states that the whole process brings her peace and joy.



A wall at The King Center in Atlanta, GA

SIDE WITH LOVE

LGBTQ Welcoming Congregation

BLACK LIVES MATTER