

HONORING LIZ FISHER, an Offering by Bob Fisher

It is with grief and sadness that I report that **Liz Fisher**, active member of the Berkeley Fellowship in the 1980s and 1990s died on 25 September 2020 of pancreatic cancer. She was 72 years old.



Liz (and Bob) were fixtures around Cedar Street and Bonita Avenue for many years. Years full of exploration, activity, group process and lots of heartwarming moments. The Fellowship was an important and meaningful place for us. We met many fine people (a phrase corrupted by Trump). Many were much older than us at

the time. The intergenerational experience we were able to have at the Fellowship is one we truly cherished. Many of our friends from our days at the Fellowship have passed on and now Liz has united with the Ancestors.

When we joined the Fellowship in January 1985, we had already been Unitarian Universalists for three years as members of the San Francisco UU Society. The overall attitude was one of tolerance of diversity, marked by lively dialogue following the services, many of which were lay lead. We felt a common bond with the other members because we shared liberal and radical values, appreciated artistic offerings, enjoyed gathering to sing folk and protest songs, undertook philosophical and spiritual inquiry, and organized for action.

Truly a Place for Non-Standard Folks Although there are many more who deserve to be remembered, these particular

members especially stood out for us as a loving community. The literary, artistic, and activist luminosities that come to mind after 35 years: Harold Rossman, Ruth Dunbar, John Dunbar, Helene Goodwin, Paul Sawyer, Dub Blackwood, Earl Holtz, Julian Sondin, Janet Sondin, Dolores Helman, Marianne Robinson, Larry Berger, Paul Rider, Nell Lutz, Hal Carlstad, Cynthia Johnson, Tracy O’Kates, and Gene Sharee.



Social Justice was a major concern for the Fellowship in the 1980s and 1990s. Liz and I were most involved with the Sanctuary Committee, a subgroup of the Social Action Committee concerned with the situation in Central America. At that time

many individuals in the Bay Area were already familiar with Latin America and the language, having traveled there before the death squads began their campaign against liberation theology, union leaders, and teachers. Archbishop Oscar Romero, who believed in the “preferential option for the poor,” was gunned down in 1980 while saying mass at the Cathedral in San Salvador; the incident was broadcast on television, awakening many North Americans to the dire situation in El Salvador, the highlands of Guatemala, and throughout Central America.

The **Sanctuary Movement** was born. ***iBasta!*** was how many of us felt. Those of us who became active in this movement and the congregations that supported this activism saw ourselves as principled Americans and people of conscience who believed in democracy for all. Because it was important to live by our ethics, we knew we had to be visible and give voice to the voiceless.

Pledging to provide advocacy and protection to those fleeing persecution, the Berkeley Fellowship voted to become a Sanctuary church on June 12, 1983. The Fellowship joined the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant of churches and synagogues. More than half of the UU churches in the Pacific Central District took Sanctuary stands, supporting public educational efforts and coalition building around the state of affairs in Central America, as well as offering material sustenance.



In 1985, the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly unanimously voted to commend and support the Sanctuary Movement and condemn government surveillance of churches and fellowships. The UU Service Committee was a major advocate of both Sanctuary and Human Rights in Central America, sponsoring several Congressional fact-finding trips to the region. Liz and Bob were co-regional coordinators of UUSC and were leaders at the local and district levels. Our BFUU group was one of the most active and outspoken. ***¡Paz con Dignidad!*** The Sanctuary Committee had a cluster of leaders including (but not limited to) Geneva Gates, Anna Ballou, Martha Roberts, Alan Robb, Bill Balderston, Elizabeth Macleod, and Joan Daley.

Liz plunged into administrative tasks at the Fellowship, at times spending 20-25 hours a week (unpaid) on various responsibilities, including office management and Sunday services. One of the big engagements at the time was the refurbishing of Fellowship Hall and the Education building. It entailed painting, improved overhead lighting, heating and ventilation, adequate power,

kitchen enhancements, landscaping, etc. Liz essentially functioned as a volunteer coordinator, recruiting, keeping track of information and skills needed, matching members to opportunities, and apprising and advising the congregation.



It wasn't always smooth sailing at the Fellowship. There were issues such as whether to clap following the sermon, whether the minister was full or part time and whether to sign a petition to recall the Board President. There were contentious congregational

meetings, clashes, bruised egos, true and false accusations, and even the Israeli-Palestinian struggle figured into Fellowship life.

Liz and Bob were heavily involved in denominational affairs at the Fellowship, attending numerous district meetings and in 1994, 1988 and 1986 we represented BFUU as delegates at UUA General Assembly. Both of us were involved in fund raising events such as the Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day dances, the annual book/yard sale, and the yearly pledge drive at the Fellowship.

In 1986-87 a lot of effort went into adopting a General Assembly Resolution on a Woman's **Right to Choose**. Liz as a GA Delegate and Co-Convener of the Women & Religion Task Force (PCD) spearheaded an effort to save the Resolution that had been jeopardized by a substitute motion. Since 1963 the UU denomination has shown an historic commitment to reproductive justice/abortion rights and has mobilized others to protect the fundamental human right to free choice, including a 1985 Resolution defending family planning agencies from bombings.

[Bob was involved in his own obligations too, for example, establishing a Council of committee chairs, directing the Ministerial Relations Committee and serving as Pacific Central District Moderator for a 2-year term.]

Society for the Larger Ministry (SLM) Liz was a deep thinker and outspoken advocate of what it means to be a “minister.” There was some behind-our-backs gossip about the Fellowship being “anti-cleric” in its attitude. But really we were following in the Universalist tradition of creating a vision that allows all who wish to serve the community a place in ministry whether they have chosen formal theological training or not. SLM organizing meetings were held at BFUU in 1988.

The Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation

recognizes those significant contributions that extend and enhance our mission of “advancing justice for women and girls, and promoting their spiritual growth.”

We therefore present the

Ministry to Women Award

to

Liz Fisher

In recognition of her exemplary and impactful leadership.

Elizabeth Fisher has studied the feminine divine throughout her life and around the world. Her curriculum, *Rise Up & Call Her Name*, a multicultural, multidimensional educational experience first published in 1995, continues to inform and influence us. Liz has worked as a tireless advocate for Women’s Rights as Human Rights and the power of the Shared Leadership model to counter patriarchal, hierarchical societal norms.

We count her as an honored Foremother to UUWF and UU Women & Religion.

Presented June 24, 2020



Claire Sexton
Claire Sexton, UUWF Board President

Many denominations more conservative than our own have a well-respected category called “lay ministry.” Lay people in our denomination who are committed to community development,

spiritual quest, and social justice, and who are demonstrating their commitment by their active involvement, deserve recognition and support. By requiring that all who act as ministers have theological degrees we may be inhibiting the diversity of voices our denomination so cherishes.

In response to these issues Liz wrote about and promoted ***The Circle Model of SHARED LEADERSHIP*** (the book is available from the Store at www.uuwt.org) as a concrete group facilitation process that balances achieving tasks with emotional bonding. These concepts of “nurturing the mind and soul of the group” were first published in 1986, revised in 2001, and again in May 2019. The exciting vision of empowering all who participate was one Liz returned to over and over as a member of the Berkeley Fellowship and co-convenor of the district Women and Religion Task Force.



She co-authored ***Gender Justice: Women’s Rights Are Human Rights*** (1996) published by the UU Service Committee, compiled resources for feminist worship and created a workshop on Shared Leadership based on a commitment to democracy and mutual respect. She was one of the initiators of the *Bay Mist Weavers*, the local chapter of the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans. Circle Consciousness and Shared Leadership became a belief

system for both of us perfecting the fine art of common goals, partnership, conversation, social conscience and companionship.

The Berkeley Fellowship (www.BFUU.org) and UU Women & Religion (www.UUWR.org) functioned as a base community for Liz during the time she created, developed and launched her acclaimed curriculum ***Rise Up & Call Her Name: A Woman-honoring Journey into Global Earth-based Spiritualities***. Anticipating the coming need for intersectionality, the curriculum explores the multicultural roots of feminist theology. It followed the far-reaching women's spirituality course ***Cakes for the Queen of Heaven*** by Rev. Shirley Ranck which Liz helped to get published.



Rise Up recognizes and promotes better understanding of the multiplicity of differences among us. The curriculum values, preserves and celebrates women's rich and unique experiences. The program enriches our spiritual lives through experiential methods and reflects on the power of our beliefs. Check out the UUWR legacy website curated by Liz:

www.RiseUpAndCallHerName.com and take a look at the wonderful posts and resources. Look into Liz's essay in the 2017 Skinner House Book, *Pagan and Earth-Centered Voices in Unitarian Universalism* to see how ***Rise Up & Call Her Name*** feeds the soul of so many.

Liz addresses what's so important about religious imagery in her Introduction to ***Rise Up—Crystallizing the Vision***: “The current teachings of world religions frequently undervalue the Earth-honoring aspects of these spiritual traditions. Focusing on goddesses and Earth-honoring aspects of spiritual and religious

practices provides a needed balance. This endeavor is often interdisciplinary, drawing on cultural anthropology, social history, world religion, mythology, archeology, and so on. It can help us freshen our perspective as we come to know some of the not-so-well publicized, underlying values of Earth-centered traditions.” For instance see Liz’s essay, ***Lilith Meets the Green Man***, in [Goddess 2.0 Advancing a New Path Forward](#), an anthology by Karen Tate, or the PDF version is available on the [Rise Up website](#). Liz presented the Lilith story as a Sunday morning talk at BFUU on March 22, 2009.

There’s so much more to say about the fun, curious, creative, brilliant life of Liz Fisher in our 48 years together becoming best friends and lovers. Such as her trips to China for the International Women’s Conference, Malta for the ancient goddess temples, and England for a pilgrimage to Stonehenge, Avebury and Glastonbury. There is Joy in a Community of Seekers. There is Knowledge and Passion in Nature. There is Direct Experience of Cosmic Consciousness. There is Love.



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