

Faithful Fools



STREET MINISTRY
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FOOLS FABLES

Annual Newsletter ■ Fall 2011



REALIZING POSSIBILITY

- Rev. Dr. Kay Jorgensen

Rev. Sarah Barber Brown is a scholar and an artist who seeks out interesting truths. Through her writing and her curiosity she creates images that reveal what she has discovered. We met in a *Study of Worship* course and our first

but the words sang of a pietistic belief that this world was not my home. My “treasures” are laid up and stored in heaven; the goal that I would achieve by saying “no” to movies, dancing, playing cards with “gambling hands” and more. It was Christ whom I was to invite into my life and by this alone would I become good – saved from the sin into which I was born.

Sarah listened in disbelief, asked some relevant questions and, I thought, had forgotten the incident until the last day of class when she marched into the room bearing a huge package that she carried like a baby and told me to open it. What rolled out was a huge puffy...red pillow? Was it a word? YES! It was the word “YES”! She had been so moved by this idea of the negative, empty space created in me that she just had to make the largest “yes” she possibly could. It was to be an invitation to dance and to sing on the altar of my artistic heart. So it has hung in many places where the struggle for truths and possibilities can be spoken. Now we hang it at the Faithful Fools as we ask ourselves “what do we say ‘yes’ to?”

Sarah Barber Brown

assignment was to relate some of our own childhood experiences of worship that may have been inspirational. Nothing came to me. I drew a blank except for remembering some hymns we had learned. The music was nice

*“A bird does not sing
because it has an answer. It
sings because it has a song.”*

- chinese proverb

“FOOLS ARE FUELED BY GENEROSITY”

- Sr. Carmen Barsody, OSF

The upper room at Faithful Fools was bursting with poets to celebrate the release of our 4th poetry anthology. Some poets came across the bridge or on train from the East Bay. Some came from their home in San Francisco while others came from their SRO (single room occupancy) hotel, their public shelter bed, their van or from their cardboard in a doorway. When FIR (Fool in Residence) Josh Mann, welcomed the overflowing crowd he said, “The work of Faithful Fools is fueled by generosity.”

“YES!” I said to myself. It is the generosity of so many people, so many poetic and faithful souls that keeps us creatively present in this world of overflowing challenges. People give generously with a hope that the return will affect the life of another.

Many and varied are the needs that arrive at the doorway of the Faithful Fools building on Hyde Street or to the doorway of a Fool’s awareness. We may be asked for a blanket, for food or for a place to do service learning, for help to get to an appointment, for money for rent or a phone bill, or for space for a meeting or dance practice. Sometimes we are asked to share the excitement of a new home or a new job. We often open the door to someone simply seeking a relationship with people who recognize their need and their potential. We welcome them all in.

We thank you for fueling the work of Faithful Fools with your generosity. You are standing here at the doorway with us. Your generosity is indeed affecting the lives of those who come to the door seeking relationship and resources to fill basic human needs. Your “YES!” of time and money makes it possible for us to say, “YES! We are here! Welcome into this community of Faithful Fools!”



How the Fools Say the Word "Yes"

- Ed Bowers

The Faithful Fools are a street ministry. People go to them for help. The Fools do not attempt to convert anybody to anything other than the desire to live a creative life. They do not attempt to transform anybody into a concept other than the desire to live and love.

The Fools [are many things, they are] a womb of creativity... they offer the opportunity to pursue other introspective forms of consciousness ...and they conduct street retreats.

In listing many of the positive projects that the Fools engage in, I am not even mentioning the subtle actions committed by them, the attention and friendship they give to those who simply put themselves, for whatever reason, in their zone.

So how do I write about how the Fools say "yes?" "Yes" is a loaded word. It is used in a multitude of ways.

The thing about the Fools is that they don't need to say "yes." People can say anything they want, but if it's just words, it will remain just words. The Fools might not use the "yes" word a lot, but they mean what they don't say. A dog doesn't need to say it's a dog. It is a dog. And the Fools don't need to say "yes." They are "yes." They try to do what they say. They are Fools.

I can safely say that the Fools saved my life. I'd been an alcoholic for years, and had maintained, but the last two years was like living in a prison. I had to drink every two hours or else suffer nausea, bulimic vomiting, panic attacks, and an inability to function either as a human being or as a drunk. It was pretty bad, and I didn't know how to kick the drink without becoming incapacitated. Then my body broke down ("There is more wisdom in your body than in your deepest philosophy," wrote Nietzsche) and whom did I call to drive me to the hospital? Who was there for me when nobody else was? Right. The Fools. Sister Carmen drove me there, and with writers Joe Donahue and Alan Kaufman, convinced the powers that be that I stay [in the hospital] until they could make sure that I wasn't going to die. More people die from alcohol withdrawal than they do from quitting heroin. It's bad. Don't try it in your living room.

I never intended to belong to this group. I despise most groups. What led me to them came to me from the unconscious, a behind the scenes deal. I always say that the best things in life or death come from the unconscious, so I guess this was the case. But the Fools are a different kind of organization. From my point of view all I had to do to be a member of them was be myself. I have tried being myself in other groups, but it just didn't work out. The Fools is the one organization I cannot criticize, because it's a group that respects the dignity of the individual, believes individual life to be sacred, and has decided that if you want to save the world from unnecessary strife, then you start by helping one or two people. Then, maybe, those one or two people can go on to help another one or two people, etc., etc.. Whether you need a creative outlet, S.S.I.,

or a place to live, the Fools will help you. Then, that's it. They're not going to rub it in later and demand repayment.

The Fools deal with many people that respectable society has kicked to the curb, whose numbers are growing exponentially. Fewer and fewer people in the future will be compatible with the current system. If a system doesn't work, it just doesn't work. Ask the Soviet Union. If a system does not fit a person, the person should not be forced to fit a system. The Fools are there for a handful of other Fools, 'Nobodies' who do not fit into any system and must be accepted as they are, warts and all, before they can change into the 'Somebody' who they really want to be.

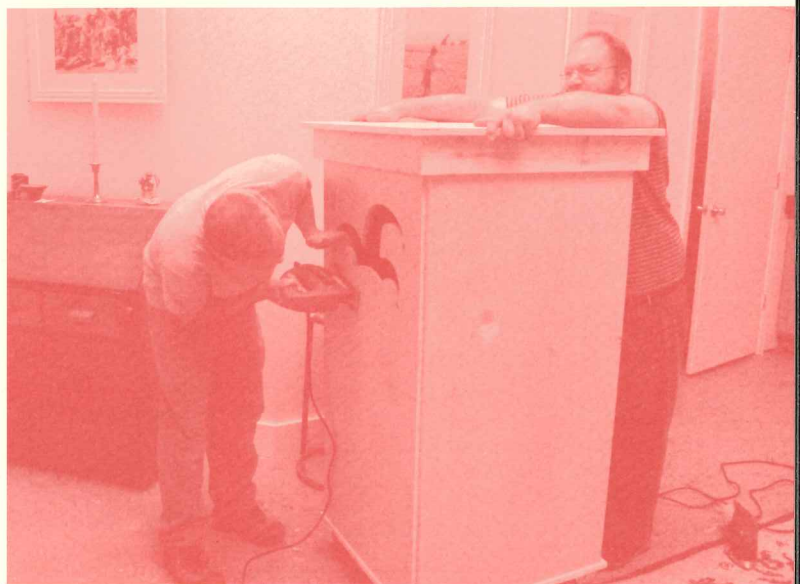
Perhaps the Fools represent a tiny evolutionary step forward in the way we treat each other as human beings. The fundamentalists aren't going to like them because they don't impose spiritual beliefs on people. The Marxists aren't going to like them because many of the Fools have deep spiritual beliefs. And the capitalists aren't going to like them because they believe people are always more valuable than money.

But the Fools are a ray of light. I'm not a utopian. As long as human beings occupy human minds and bodies, there will never be a heaven on Earth. But they can try. I admire trying. All I really know is that the Fools have said "yes" to me and followed it up with action. They started a poetry magazine, helped cover my rent, assisted my ex-wife, drove me to the hospital and endorsed my Poet In A Box project. What more could I ask? I am very grateful.

Denis and Joe building the Poetry Box



*Ed Bowers reading poetry
(both photos)*





Gina on arrival at the Mount Shasta view area

"I was in awe that this was actually going to happen and I was anxious."

When we finally arrived in Ashland, my mother called with the surprising news that her mother, Rose-Helene had just died. Mom asked me to be in Montreal for the wake and funeral. I didn't hesitate.

For three days in Oregon, I was in an odd liminal space. Half of the time, I was alone with my computer, making travel arrangements and finding substitutes for the memorial and worship services I was to lead that weekend. The other half of the time I was with the group, this newly-forming family, swimming, eating, playing and laughing.

Tom's adoptive mom surprised me, reminding me so much of Rose-Helene, as she was when I was a child: boisterous, full of laughter, wisdom, self-assurance, and a fierce independence tempered by the love of her family. It was a reminder to me that whatever the mission is that we embark on, no matter who is at the center, we all walk together in the most unexpected ways.

So, I keep showing up.

-Rev. Denis Letourneau Paul, BodySoul Care Program Coordinator

There Is Hope

Under the clear Oregon skies with the majesty of Mount Shasta looming over us and the rushing of the Rogue River to keep our spirits moving, we truly experienced something magical.

Written by Gina Carson-King and Andrea Jorgensen

Gina and I have collaborated on the telling of this story. Our combined reflections and my observations are woven together in order to share with you, this amazing journey. Josh Mann, Denis Paul and Gina's husband John also reflect on their experience to complete the tale.

We prepared for the practical aspects of our trip and we prepared for the unknowns. I was pleasantly surprised at how well we travelled together, this group of five fools (and Nana the chihauhua), on our three-day and two-night trip to Medford, Oregon for Gina to finally reunite with her birth son.

Mother always said, "If you need something to cry about I'll give you something to cry about..." What made me go wrong? I don't want to blame it on my parents but growing up was intense on every level. Mom was young and did the best she could. I always wonder though, shouldn't a grown person know right from wrong? Mother had a bar-dancing career so I often ended up in foster homes. Then I would be snatched out of those places. We moved around a lot and stayed in hotels and cars, frequently I was witness to her getting beat up by boyfriends. My drug use started early.

Some 25 years ago I gave birth to a 22", 7 lb. baby. My mother was saying "don't give Gina the baby," I felt betrayed because I thought that she saw me trying. It was set up as an open adoption. Soon after, I went to prison and during that time I received a note that said, "we've moved." I knew they were in Tennessee somewhere but that's all I knew. When I got out of prison my addiction took off.

Gina had a difficult time for many years. When her son Thom turned 21 his adoptive sister, Teah, helped him hire a private investigator to find his birth mother. They were able to track her down to a bar in San Francisco by first finding Gina's mother. Gina was able to take the call but was so embarrassed by her own living situation on the streets that she couldn't engage in a relationship.

When I got clean I could not stop thinking about him. It was awful; I'd wake up thinking about him, all day.

Just in the last three years my husband John has made me open my ears and my eyes and just look at it (my past trauma.) In remembering experiences we had while still "using," he is also able to remind me just how good our life is going. It's easy to be a heroin addict, because you have an excuse for feeling bad - you need to get the fix. It's harder to be really present with yourself when you are not feeling good (like what sometimes happens while on methadone) and to know you will be ok because it won't



"I was amazed to see how much he looked like her."

-Josh Mann

Gina and her son Thomas

*I'd like to have a strong
relationship with my son.
I don't know if it will
happen but it is possible.*



*Denis, Andy, John, Josh and
Gina by the Doubletree Cabin*

last forever. It hit home.

As time progressed I felt that I had a really good support system that I never thought I would have. Faithful Fools let me work things out, something I never had growing up. By being still, other things seemed to happen.



John, Gina and Josh

One day I came upstairs and asked Melissa what would be the first thing to do to find my son. "Seems like you've already started!" she said. It is what I needed to hear to be ok and move forward. A couple of agencies seemed like bull. Carmen found the adoptive mother's address, got her number and sent cards out, but I didn't get anything. April Fools Day I got a hold of Thom's parents. It was a year of working to make contact. I asked people at the Fools to help me get a Facebook account. Aww man...gratitude, gratitude, gratitude!!

At first my son and I managed little bits of conversation that felt really uncomfortable. Texting helped because I could think about what I would say before I said it. I didn't want to give him bad stories or come off too negative. I knew I had to be there with him to be able to talk comfortably. It was decided that the Fools would help me get to Oregon where my son and his family live. I was in awe that this was actually going to happen, and I was anxious. This would be one of the hardest things I ever had to do.

Thom and I were able to meet each other for the first time as adults in a beautiful setting, just the two of us. We went for a walk in the woods to talk. Things began to unfold and seemed very natural. It couldn't have turned out better. When I saw Thom he was well nourished and even-keeled. He thought about things as he answered my questions about these parents who had raised him.

Tam is Thom's mom and she had kept pictures from 5th grade on to be shared someday with Thom's birth mom. All these years I felt like I could have been more a part of his life but I thought it would hurt him more than help. It was a full time job hurting myself and being my own worst enemy. But the Whiteakers kept the faith, which is so remarkable! Tam had made me a beautiful quilt. I've never been gifted with something made for me with so much love, and I am really touched.

All of these years he was being watched over. They kept him safe; he had the kind of mother who would fight for him.

So many things are different now, especially in my health. Number one, I was addicted for over 25 years. I care for myself differently now. It is so important to watch my breath, keep drinking water and sleeping. I meditate regularly. Being still is amazing, watching my breath, catching up with my thoughts.



John, Gina and Nana

I'm proud that Gina went there without freeze-ups or hitches. We got no sleep before we left the city. I'm her husband and wherever she goes, I go. We've been together now 10 years - married almost 4. She's come a long way from when I couldn't keep her still for a whole day. I am also proud of Thom. He is a good guy. Jumping off that cliff with him at Emigrant Lake was the best part of the whole trip and then also being up at the cabin. I appreciated everybody that came, its great to be a part of a place like this. Things happen that might never ever have happened otherwise. - John King

Separating what was truth and what wasn't. Guilt was killing me relative to giving up my son. Now I have a place to stay, benefits and support from the Faithful Fools. All of a sudden it was ok to cry, to be able to work through things.

I'd like to have a strong relationship with my son. I don't know if it will happen but it is possible. Being honest with myself and letting things happen naturally is what I can see for the future. I will keep that candle lit. I have deep reverence, and I pray for his safety until I can see him again and be more a part of his life.

On our return, the mood was celebratory, yet a bit sobering. Even for those who had not traveled with us, the overwhelming feeling of gratification was evident. There is often a fatigue that goes with the work we do. Yes, it is also vibrant and fulfilling but so many stories are ongoing without a conclusion or an outcome. People and their lives usually just don't "get better" quickly. Sometimes it never happens. Happily ever after is amazing but rare. Certainly there are places of progress in some people's stories and even places of happiness along the way - but nothing like what we felt for Gina - almost as if "our work was done."

Gina knows there is still work to do. How do you establish a relationship with someone so connected to you yet you hardly know them? She'll find the way...with a few fools at her side, of course.

Two images have really stayed with me as I've watched Gina's process of reuniting with her biological son, Thom. The first I saw through the window of the cabin we stayed at in Merlin, Oregon. Gina and Tom were seeing each other for the first time in two decades, and I watched the two of them embrace. The icing on the cake was that they were practically wearing the same thing - green and grey military surplus camouflage pants and white shirts (a t-shirt on Thom, a tank top on Gina). When I saw his face for the first time, I was amazed to see how much he looked like her.

The second image was Gina walking through Fools' Court a couple of days after we returned. She was glowing (almost literally)! She was exuding a kind of light and brilliance to a degree that I'd never seen from her before. It was a beautiful thing to behold.

-Josh Mann, Outreach Minister/Fool in Residence

It's Beyond Explanation!

- By Abby Dolin

When I was asked to write in response to what I say "yes" to at the Fools, I was at a loss for words. It's both what I give and what I get. I have discovered new talents, appreciation and confidence that I never felt before. I feel like this is home. I am more loved than ever before.



Susan Knudson, Bobby and Abby Dolin (front)

The Feeling of YES!

- Josh Mann

Over the last three or four years, I have been paying a lot more attention to the physical sensations and feelings that I experience when something deep in me says "YES!" Often my breathing gets deeper and more expansive. My chest opens, and my sternum lifts. My abdominal muscles loosen and soften. Sometimes, I feel my tongue relax in my mouth or the part of the ribcage in my sides or back expand. Sometimes there's a little thrill, excitement, or sense of wonder. At other times, there's a feeling of peace, ease, or relaxation.

When I asked myself if I wanted to leave Oregon for the first time and move to San Francisco, I would experience many of these sensations. Something deep in me seemed to be saying "YES!" even though I didn't have any kind of job or housing lined up and even though I only knew a few people in the area. I decided to follow this feeling of "YES!" I decided to go and do something foolish.



Knowing Your "No," Being Present With Your "Yes"

- Rev. Denis Paul

When I first came to the Faithful Fools, as a new Unitarian Universalist minister, I signed on to something that would not fit neatly into pre-existing categories. Three years later, I'm surprised by some of the things I've said YES to.

I've said yes following the example of Universalist circuit riding preachers, homilectating all over the West Coast, spreading the Word and Ways of the

Josh Mann, Resident Fool



Former Interns gather for Fellowship of Fools organizing. The Reverends Denis Paul, Karen Day, Cathy Harrington, Mary Ganz along with mentors Rev. Dr. Kay Jorgensen and Sr. Carmen Barsody, OSF

Fools like the Sower of the parable. Yes to deepening relationships with UU congregations, and even taking the bold step of officially affiliating with a congregation 300 miles away in Bakersfield, identifying myself as "their" Community Minister. Yes to creating the Fellowship of Fools, Unitarian Universalist, and making worship erupt in unexpected ways, in unexpected places. Yes to dressing loudly and speaking softly.

I've said yes to creating words like homilectating, and writing every week with Robert-Harry and the gang at Write On.

Most of all, I've said yes to being present to the people we walk with, people like Gina and Ed and Jay and Jeannie, all of whom expand my understanding of the universe, each and every time we meet.

But saying "yes" has also meant saying "no." As Saul Alinsky always said, what good is a yes when you can't say no? My work has become a big red YES, bold, commanding attention, unavoidable. But if you look close enough, that YES is filled with a million little green NOs, like the inexplicable yet somehow logical dot matrix of a TV monitor, present, full of the potential that makes life worth living.

Yes? Really . . .

Yes! - Sam Noir

It's 2,000 miles from Minneapolis, Minnesota to the Fools' Court on Hyde Street. It was 25 years from the time I left the Bay Area until the day I moved into the blue room below the stairs. I can't even imagine

how to describe the distance between being the dean of a college to being a Fool . . . not as far as you might think and a whole lot further than I, myself, expected. But here I am. Blink. Swallow. Gulp. Ye-up (that would be mid-west speak for "yes," don't cha know?)

I met Carmen last February and she said, "Yes, you can make a film about the Fools." So I said, "Okay, then I'll come do it." I came to the court a few weeks later to start doing interviews with one Fool after another. I hadn't been here but a week when some clown asked me when I was moving in (yes, Oscar that was you!) Did I say yes? Nope, I don't think so. In fact, I think my exact quote was "Huh?"

I hung around long enough to find out that a "huh" is as good as a "yes" when there's work to be done and fun to be had. So I'm putting to use the stuff I learned to do as a dean (grant writing, admin stuff) and I'm learning new stuff as an artist (making the film, working with Martha Boesing to get new runs of Song of the Magpie and The Witness off and running). Pretty much every day I say, "Sure" to one thing or another (which would be Sam-speak for "Yes!")



"Tension is the Soul's Original Prayer"

- Marsha Campbell

May 12, 2011 (From the Thursday afternoon writers' group at the Faithful Fools)

This class has become available to us through an act of God, whoever that is. He/She is a peaceful spirit that persuades this room upstairs at Faithful Fools, and Robert-Harry is His/Her instrument for providing that peace. Let us listen to the Zen flute innuendos that pervade our consciousness here. Let us cleanse ourselves from the commotion that was engendered here by the negative stranger even as we feel sorrow towards his inability to take advantage of the spiritual light that this class offers to whoever is open to its precepts.

Let us take up the offering of "5 more minutes" and turn it into an act of possibility that flowers into our being for as long as we can allow it to last - from another hour to several hours to 24 hours to a week when we will meet again to reinforce the positive self-knowledge that has been given to us through spiritual ideation. Let us drift into a world of kindness and mutual emotional responsibility. Let our souls sing with a new standard of happiness.



Yes

When one is committed

things fall into place

options no longer fit

No room for peppering

regrets, doubts

creatively challenging

Yes

The Spirit assists

shapes, realigns

Happenings unfold

new possibilities erupt

Yes

Coming deep from the

heart's cave

Leaving footprints

Standing open-faced

ready, willing

Yes

Value shifting

not cost-saving,

(probably costly)

but warm enough

to sleep at night

Yes

- Ade Kroll



Faithful Fools



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"On the Streets We Discover Our Common Humanity"

www.faithfulfools.org 415.474.0508

At 234 Hyde Street...

ZENDO

Mondays 9:00am to 10:00am
Tuesdays 8:15am to 8:45am (orientation)
9:00am to 10:00am
6:15pm to 6:45pm
Thursdays 9:00am to 10:00am
Fridays 9:00am to 10:30am
(includes discussion)
Sundays 3:00pm to 5:00pm
(includes Nichiren Shu service)

WEEKLY

Thursdays

Bible Study 10:00am to 11:00am
Write On 1:00pm to 3:30pm

Friday

Narcotics Anonymous 7:00pm to 8:00pm

MONTHLY

Second Saturdays

Movie and discussion 7:00pm to 9:00pm

Third Saturdays

Street Retreat 9:00am to 5:00pm
Singing & Drumming 6:30pm to 8:30pm

Endowment for "Street-Level Learning" to Honor Rev. Dr. Kay Jorgensen

For 13 years interns from seminaries, colleges and the institute of life have come to Faithful Fools to learn and be mentored by Kay and all the Fools who walk the streets. The Honorary Doctorate Diploma that Kay received from Starr King School for the Ministry in 2004 acknowledged her as a "Steward of Street-Level Learning".

Being the Fools that we are, at a time that the stock markets are jumping up and down (and not necessarily in joy) we set a goal of \$80,000 for a "Street-Learning Endowment". Tell your friends. Tell your congregations. Imagine it possible within our collective faithfulness. In January of 2012 we celebrate the 80th birthday of Rev. Dr. Kay Jorgensen by establishing this endowment in order to assure that internships for street-level learning continue for years to come.

*Compassionate ally and advocate of society's most marginalized,
Witness to the creative arts as ministry for ALL ages,
Educator of the importance of spiritual practice,
Steward of street level experiential learning.*

As a pioneering public minister, you have raised the value of community ministry in the UU movement as a whole. You have built a vibrant organization with the well-known name of Faithful Fools, which serves the spiritual needs of thousands of people who live on the streets – not just in San Francisco, but in streets across the nation, and even in Nicaragua. You have found a way to acknowledge the illusionary walls that separate human beings. Your work affirms that, embodied justice and compassion can happen on a daily basis, quietly, personally, emotionally, and with the highest standards of humanity. In gratitude for your unswerving commitment to the common good and for the example you have set, the degree, Sacrae Theologiae Doctor