

## **A FEW HIGHLIGHTS OF MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY**

### **SUE AGEE**

August, 2006

My spiritual journey began in a small community in the heart of Virginia named Buckingham Courthouse. It had a population of about 150 with a Methodist church on one end, a Baptist church in the middle and my church, the Presbyterian, on the other end. We lived between the Presbyterian church and the Methodist parsonage and my mother used to laugh and say we had to be good because of where we lived.

My first memories of church really came from my mother. She said when I was about four, I just got up and went to the front of the church and started singing. She had to run up and get me. I remember very vividly going to Sunday School every Sunday and studying the catechism ("God is love"). We also used to sing "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world". I also remember going to church service and singing in the choir as soon as I was old enough. I also went to Bible school in the summer and later helped teach it.

There were two major highlights of my spiritual life as a child. The first one was the live Christmas manger. The Baptist church for about one week before Christmas would build a manger outside of the church and use real people as Mary, Joseph, shepherds and live sheep. We would go up every night in the dead of winter (it does get cold back there, as many of you know) and just congregate, look, stare, and be amazed. It really had an impact on me; impressed on me that Christmas was a very special time. It still is for me.

The other major highlight was in the summer when the Baptist church would hold revival services for a week in the evening in the summer. A minister from out of town would come to preach. As soon as I was old enough, I would walk up to the church (probably with my sister) and sit through the preaching and then when they called for people to accept Jesus or come to the altar, everybody would sing the hymn "Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me". Every night I would head up to the altar. It was almost as if there was a string attached between me and the altar. I did not really understand what I was doing. I just knew I had to go.

I was active in the church all through college but as I moved away from Virginia I could not find another church home until about 1970 when I went to the Unitarian on Franklin street in the city.

At age 40 another very significant spiritual thing happened. My second marriage had ended and I had reconnected with an old boyfriend. After making love one night it was as if I just "woke up" and said "I do believe I am more than a body". As a result of this, I began to do quite a few New Age kind of workshops, attend Unity Church and Science of Mind Church. After one workshop, I found the book "Love is Letting go of Fear". I read it and realized that perhaps for the first time in my 40 years I might be beginning to have a sense of what this thing "love" was.

The third group of significant things happened when I came to San Francisco and was staying with a friend in Noe Valley. I was walking on 24<sup>th</sup> street and saw the church sign. Something

inside my head said “I think maybe I know some people there”. I went the next Sunday and there was Carl Smith. I felt right at home and have been coming here in various ways since 1982. At that time I also found the San Francisco Zen Center. My second husband and I had practiced transcendental meditation and when we broke up I missed having a meditation partner. I looked for a new meditation style and found Zen. The first day I went to the San Francisco Zen Center I felt right at home there too. I used to go to the afternoon meditations and meditate with Carl at the church in the morning. On Saturday mornings I would go to the meditation and lecture at Zen Center and then come to church on Sunday. I eventually moved into Zen Center (where I lived for 5 years) and due to the demands on my time made by being a Zen student (and the physical distance) I lessened my activities at the church.

The third significant thing that happened during the time period of 1982 was that I found (or it found me) *A Course in Miracles*. I had heard about it and was told that if you called the publisher they would send the books for free (I was not working at that time so I did not have a lot of money to spend). They sent all three volumes and I read the workbook (which is supposed to be done over a period of a year) in 2 or 3 days alternating between periods of exaltation and weeping. It affected me deeply.

The most significant life changing experience happened in November or December of 1984. I was working at Greens restaurant which Zen Center owned and was waiting to move into Zen Center. I had a bread addiction and Greens would let you take any leftover food after lunch home with you. They served Tassajara bread which I am sure many of you remember. Well, one evening at about 6 pm I was upset about something (probably about the uncertainty of my life and where I was heading) and went to the meditation area at the church. The sanctuary was quiet and pretty dark. As I entered the meditation area there in front of the stacks of meditation cushions was Jesus! I could not see him with my physical eyes but with what I call my “spiritual eyes”. I was awestruck and felt the most unimaginable sense of total love, acceptance and peace. I do not remember how long I stood there and just drank in the wonderful feelings. I think I did finally start crying, mostly out of a sense of some kind of deep relief. I took the bread I was eating downstairs and gave it to the man who used to be the church caretaker who lived in the building. This was a totally astounding experience for me and gave me a sense of knowing that Jesus is alive, with me and among us all. Soon after that I joined the church as a full time member (January, 1985).

In 2002 I went back to Virginia and stayed with my elderly mother in my home town. After 6 months of being in a small town again, I was ready to return home to San Francisco, but it was another year and two months before it was on God’s timetable for me to return.

I returned April, 2004 and stayed with John Brunn who was so kind to open his home to me. Every day I would head down the hill and come to the church to read, meditate, rest, etc. have lunch and then go to the library using Craigslist looking for my new home. It was a time of waiting, searching, wondering and being puzzled that nothing was happening, I thought. At the end of October, I decided to go and spend the holidays with my sister in Phoenix.

During this time, two other significant spiritual things happened. I had heard a minister on television that I liked, and he had written a book that I wanted. My sister gave it to me for

Christmas. It changed my life, particularly the chapter on trusting God's timing, and his belief that we need to maintain a good attitude and sustaining faith in God. The book really helped to shift my thinking into a more positive vein. Also, one Sunday afternoon when my sister was away, I was listening to a motivational humorist female speaker on public television. She said "You do want an amazing life, don't you?" I answered out loud, "Yes, I do!"

In January of 2005, I returned to the city and things began to happen. I found Graceworks, a wonderful job support group at Grace Cathedral which meets every Monday in the morning and has top speakers and presenters in the field of career/life planning. Through going to that group I got free career counseling at Jewish Vocational Services. My goal was to go back to work 20 hours part-time as a vocational counselor. Sometime around June, I had reconnected with the Life's Work Center and decided to go through their program which is based on Richard Bolles's book, "What Color is Your Parachute". The program has you dig deeply inside yourself and see what you really feel called to do. I did that twice a week for 5 months and at the end of the time, I did my Ideal Job Portrait which turned out to be, to my surprise, to start my own business in career/life planning and money counseling and maybe to work 20 hours a week as a career counselor in a non-profit. Through this program I discovered that I have about thirteen passions (I hardly knew before this that I had any). I really was surprised about the idea of starting my own business, but it all felt right. I registered my business with the city and county of San Francisco in October of 2005. Meanwhile my dreams keep coming true and I keep growing, learning, praying and listening. I feel like, with God's and Christ's help, I am finally beginning to create a life that I love. I am smiling a lot more and having more fun and enjoying life more. I really do believe with all I have been learning and studying, that we all have unlimited potential and it is exciting to discover those potentials.

This is a gift of a poem that has particularly spoken to me over the last 10 months.

Thank you very much and in the words of Tiny Tim, Mr. Scrooge's friend, "God bless us one and all".