

**Standing on the Shoulders of Those Who Came Before
Service March 5, 2023**

Prior Reading:

The Baton

It was one of those track races.

Coach said it would be good for us.

There were just a few of us. Only one good runner.

So, that is how we ended up in the 4 by 100-meter **Relay Race**.

I was big and slow, so I got to start. I ran as fast as I could until my lungs were burning, my legs weak and my heart racing. When I saw the passing zone ahead, I dreaded the awful fate if I failed to pass the baton successfully to Henry who was waiting for me in the passing zone. With a final lunge I just managed to pass the baton to him before he shot out of the passing zone on the next leg of the race.

Subsequently, he successfully passed the baton to John and he to Sam who was our best runner.

We lost the race.

This was not unusual as our school had few boys and everyone needed to participate in everything to make a go of it.

The lesson in all of this is that faced with adversity, there are two choices. You can give up and go away, or try harder.

In an important sense, we learned to be **undefeated** by a single loss, however common.

Winning is not always being first.

It is being undefeated no matter the losses along the way, to arise and try again like the Lord of LaManchia

Some people call it hope. (see next page)

Standing on the Shoulders of Those Who Came Before

I stand before you today appreciative of the unusual time we have together. I believe the Sunday Sermon may be last place on the planet where a speaker can have twenty or so minutes to speak to an assembled group enjoying both their attention and close listening.

I picked the title of this sermon, “**Standing on the Shoulders of Those Who Came Before,**” after some thought.

One alternate I considered, was Unitarian Principles and Successful Stock Investing. I did not choose to do that one because the pews would be full and there would be standing room only.

While listening to many well-crafted sermons, I have come to realize each speaker necessarily reveals parts of their religious journey regardless of the subject. I will do this as well here. By the way, I gave a sermon 3/25/12 and now 2023 the second one. So, I figure my next one will be due in 2033!.

My religious journey began in the Protestant church in Durham CT. I helped my dad on Sunday as we lit the furnaces around 7 AM to bring up the heat for the morning service. After we got the furnaces blazing, we climbed to the base of the steeple inside to wind the clock for the week. It was powered by weights that slowly descended in one of the columns in front of the building.

I did not do well in Sunday School because of my early interest in science and logic.

I had a considerable problem with God.

I figured he was busy or disinterested when some church ladies were run over on Main Street in front of the church! Also, he didn't do well in looking after his son Jesus whom I soon understood was nailed to a cross, being somewhat undernourished, or not at the time, depending on available statuary.

Fast forward, on the dairy farm of my youth, I learned the meaning of a handshake deal. My Dad would reach an agreement to sell a cow with a visiting dealer. After a time, the deal was struck, a handshake ensued. Finished business.

You can understand my frustration when I had a handshake agreement to teach a year in the Champaign Illinois School system for \$8,400 big bucks in 1966. After the handshake by a few days, I checked in to explore the ensuing silence, I learned the Superintendent had, and here I quote:

“lost interest in my application.”

So, I ended up teaching for a year in Rantoul ILL. For \$6,000.

My next employment was at what is now Central Connecticut State University. I was told I need not worry about a contract as the letter of appointment that promised an increment each year was sufficient.

When Governor Meskill took office, it was one of the first things he abolished!

We speak great deal about the peacemakers of the world and forgiveness. I must admit, I belonged to the warrior class after these events transpired.

I went on to become the President of the Faculty Union representing the State University Faculty at the time while we negotiated first and subsequent contracts, including, in part, the retirement system, guaranteed working conditions, etc., that stand to this day.

Subsequently I spent another 10 years as Vice President for Personnel for the University System.

Enough of this.

In the mid 90s we joined USH having spent time before in the and with the Unitarians in Champaign Illinois and New Britain Fellowship.

USH's Bill Willet soon suggested I would be useful to the B and G Committee. I joined, and became Secretary Pro Tem, which activity continued for at least 20 years!.

Recently I made it to Co-Chair!

Now, you have heard from time to time this building is a challenge. It was and it is. Victor Lundy was excellent at creating a symbolic Unitarian building. He was somewhat challenged with the concept of water flowing downhill.

One of the many positive aspects of the Meeting House, our buttresses represent the many paths to the truth, each of different size. The building itself of mostly natural materials signifying our close bond to our environment, and the wood it provides, while the vistas from the peripheral rooms underscore Unitarians are interested in the here and now of the outside **green** world. It is a wonderful symbolic building for Unitarians.

However, when it rained outside, it rained on the Sanctuary pews, water leaked into the rest rooms and classroom A. Fellowship Hall had never been finished, all lighting came to be outdated, the puck was a good try, but never provided a decent level of light, etc.

Let me mention a few prominent members in my years at USH.

Bill Willett and his wife were exemplary supporters of USH. I well remember when he was almost unable to walk with advanced cancer, he turned up on the BG workday. He

painted the metal parts of the handrails by the north stairs. He wished that we would complete the memorial garden where his son's ashes are interred. We did that. He also supported music in every way, and his efforts are memorialized behind the choir with a plaque on the wall.

I buried Bill and Louise' ashes in our memorial garden after memorial services. Janice organized the receptions and many others.

I will simply mention a few remarkable others, in my experience, for their shoulders on which we all stand today. These are but a sample with whom we have worked, many of you will surely notice those not mentioned here.

Edna May Sole, I first worked with her in 1976 and came to respect her for her tireless work on behalf of teachers in the New Britain School System. You can imagine my interest when her ashes were discovered in our memorial Garden years later. Who knew she was a Unitarian. I should have guessed.

Roy Cook, an architect worked tirelessly to maintain the vision of our Meeting House architect Victor Lundy. Roy designed the famous lighting Puck. Also, he designed part of the roof over the Sanctuary. Actually, a roof over the failing first roof. His ashes reside in our Memorial Garden as well. Today, Hugh Schweitzer is "our" Architect, recently having overseen installation of our Sanctuary lights.

Ed Sax - currently resides in Seabury. When you look about the structure of the Meeting House, his handy work is everywhere, from plumbing repairs to various electrical devices, one operating the parking lot lights for example.

Carolyn Cartland – Confined to a wheelchair most of her life, she tirelessly and in good humor led the way to handicapped accessible facilities. These added to the elevator, adding automatic opening West door, pew cuts, chancel lift and various hearing assisting devices, etc.

Carolyn Souter – long editor of the hard copy Messenger before it morphed into the current USH-Enews with the coming of web and internet communications.

Freeman Meyer, the historian who wrote the book Hartford Unitarianism 1844-1994.

Bill Westervelt, Exemplary human being, always ready to show up and do the hard work necessary. Did you know we have an offspring of the Charter Oak? Ed Richardson, big tree expert found Charter Oak offspring and Bill grew them into seedlings. Ours it well on its way to significant size

Nita Hansen – our movie queen before she passed away. She loved to discuss movies after our movie night shows.

Richard Groothuis – Whom we just lost recently, an essential participant in the Solar group as well as Book Club and IRIS organizer.

I know there is a limit to the number of really remarkable people we might mention who have inhabited these very pews. This was just a sample.

If you wish to know even more about them, just ask, or visit various pews and look at the hymn book dedications for those who previously occupied these very seats.

Over the years since 1964, a equipped kitchen was created in the empty space for it,

Fellowship Hall was finished with sound absorbing panels, painted and peripheral lighting added.

The ambulatory lights were all replaced with more efficient fluorescent tubes,

Leaking into the Sanctuary has been reduced and even, we think, pretty much stopped with a new kind of roof covering,

Carpets have been replaced

and little or no leaking of water into the Men's restroom off Fellowship Hall occurs,

and at long last, the vision of Victor Lundy has been realized with the addition of LED lighting as you know.

Can you believe it!

Today we here and now at the Meeting House continue “on the shoulders” of those who came before having taken our places in chain of progress **since 1830**.

Let me pause for a moment. Do you realize, we have never been stronger than we are today!

Have we been stressed? yes.

I was thinking that for any sermon, a good peroration is useful. What to do?

My good wife suggested, do not use names, you will forget somebody. True. So, I am going to pause here a moment, and reflect on you, the current members of our USH congregational community, along with some who have come before.

Do you know...

We have architects,
Did you know, we have a jet pilot among us,

Did you know, we have artists who work in fabric, watercolor, oils and pastels?
(Ambulatory current show comment)

Did you know, we have accountants, financial planners, and legislators,
Did you know, we have teachers at the elementary level, secondary level, and university professors?

Did you know, we have social workers and poets

Did you know, we had a Connecticut Expert on Big Trees,

Did you know, we have a design engineer, and other kinds of engineers.

Did you know, we have an Entomologists,

Did you know, we had a world-wide expert on elevators among us?

Did you know, we have electricians, and urban experts,

Did you know, we have a security expert formerly with IBM?

Did you know, we have musicians and nurses?

Did you know, we have lawyers of various sorts.

Did you know, we have MDs, & psychiatric-related personnel?

and more, and lots more, unmentioned here, and perhaps known to you.

You get the point!

Look about you. You are, right now, the most powerful group ever to inhabit these walls! With the experienced resource base of the past and those all about you today,

USH is poised to be more powerful for good than you can possibly imagine!

It is a wonderful thing, that most sitting in the pews have come here to associated positively with others.

They come in hopes of contributing in some small way to making a better world, to contribute to our planet's success,

to associate with others in a caring way,

and to pass forward a gift to future generations, as the past has done for us!

Let me simply say, those of us who have run the first leg of our life race, inexperienced and trying hard, have grown older and wiser as our physical powers have diminished. We look forward with eagerness at an appropriate time to passing the baton to you who will run the next leg of the race.

We are excited at the prospect, and have learned you shall be successful,

for you stand on the shoulders of those who came before!

There is a fragment of a poem that applies to our members over the years, it might be summarized as follow. The set of their sails determine the way we go. Here is a stanza from a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox to make the point:

One ship sails East,
And another West,
By the self-same winds that blow,
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales,
That tells the way we go.

There is a monument at the University of Illinois that stands prominently on campus. It says at its base,

To thy happy children of the future, those of the past send greetings

**We shall continue on the shoulders of those who came before!
They were successful and undefeated by adversity.
We have known and survived difficulties and prospered.**

Never, have we had such volunteer talent working on our behalf throughout USH.

You shall take the baton and “run” the next leg for your time at the “helm”,

and you will not fail!

**As it was
Let it be AND
So shall it be!**
