



Elderberries

Unitarian
Universalist
Retired Ministers
and Partners
Association

Volume 41 Number 4

Fall 2025

www.uurmapa.org



Front: Phyllis Morales, Joy Atkinson, Jane Boyajian, Deborah Raible, Nancy Reid-McKee, Patti Pomerantz, Peter Morales. **Middle:** Barry Andrews, Duane Fickeisen, Linda Andrews, Flossie Bode, Suzanne Reynolds, Toni Tortorilla, Linda Horton. **Back:** Jaco ten Hove, Linda Hart, Mitch Sukalski, Bruce Bode, Dennis Reynolds, Sonya Sukalski, Lloyd Horton. **Missing:** Lynda Sutherland

Fall Conference Podlings at Seabeck:

It's a Struggle to Not Have Fun

By Jaco ten Hove

For the fourth consecutive October, around two dozen UURMaPAns (from Washington, Oregon, British Columbia and California) gathered at Seabeck Conference Center on the beautiful Hood Canal in Washington State to view virtual programming ably provided by the continental organization's planning team AND enjoy face-to-face social time, meals and activities. This would seem to be a fully residential throwback event to the twice-annual, in-person conferences that once animated UURMaPA for years, pre-pandemic. See the accompanying pictures (one above, one with the continuation of this story) of our various conference group postures.

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**Greetings from the
Elderberries editor**

This is copyeditor Carrie Buchanan writing. I have a couple of ideas for upcoming issues.

1. In 2026, we are thinking of changing Elderberries issue names, so that they match the season when you receive the newsletter. Example: When this issue arrives, it will be winter for you, but it's the Fall 2025 issue. Under the new system, we would call it Winter 2026. Please let us know if you love or hate this idea. Email us at elderberries@uurmapa.org
2. We welcome submissions of articles and pictures from wherever you live. Send to the same email, please! For the next issue, spring themes would be great. Deadline Feb. 28.

Speculations

**By Rev. Dr. Richard Speck
UURMaPA Board President**

As fall blends into winter, the trees turn brilliant colors and leaves fall to the ground to become nutrients for the spring. I have never liked raking leaves because as soon as you finish, another deluge falls from the trees.

I am thankful I don't have to do it anymore.

Thanksgiving approaches as I write this column, so I want to offer some thanks for those who keep our organization strong. Let me start with thanks to the Conference Planning Team and Worship Team: Barbro Hansson, Sonya Sukalski, Jeff Briere, Jef Gamblee, Terry Ellen, Wayne Walder, Anita Farber-Robertson, Joan VanBecelaere, Linda Wright, Sylvia Howe. The conference had the largest attendance ever, with almost 200 people participating. The programming was stimulating and the stories and odysseys were very moving. We have improved over the years in meeting the moment with themes that are attracting ever more registrants.

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Our long time Conference Zoom Master, Jon Claney, resigned in the summer to take a full-time position with First Unitarian Church, Wilmington, Delaware. He did great work for us over several years. Replacing him is Cynthia Becker, a lifelong Unitarian Universalist who has a background in video conferences. She was behind the scenes at our recent conference. She lives in Vancouver, Canada.



Richard Speck, UURMaPA president

I also wish to thank Ann Marie Alderman for her years of service as our Membership Coordinator. She helped us transition from the old way of keeping up, with three separate spreadsheets, to our Church Center system, where we enter the data once and it sorts automatically into areas. We are still getting used to how the system works. Ann Marie had to step down due to personal concerns. We seek a new Membership Coordinator. If interested, contact me, president@uurmapa.org.

I am saddened to announce that our Treasurer, Paul Johnson, has had to resign due to health issues. Paul had hoped to complete his term as treasurer, but circumstances prevented it. We are grateful for the work that Paul was able to do, and we hope he can find some well-deserved rest. The board will be appointing a temporary treasurer to complete Paul's term. The Nominating Committee has proposed a person for the position. The board will discuss it in November.

The board is working on goals for this year. We laid out broad areas for our work and are now putting substantive plans into place to guide us and allow us to see markers for completing those goals. We are working on strengthening connections (among ourselves, primarily), improving fundraising for the organization, and increasing diversity and inclusion in our membership. Stay tuned for how you can help us fulfill these goals.

The last item I wish to discuss is our annual fund-raising appeal. You will be receiving a letter from me, asking you to contribute to our organization. We do not ask for dues to be a member but rely upon each of you contributing what you can to support UURMAPA and our programs. Please give generously when the letter comes.

I close with words from our hymnal. It is from #355 *We Lift Our Hearts in Thanks*.

**We lift our hearts in thanks today for all the gifts of life,
And most, the gifts of hope and love, of wisdom, truth and right.**

Yours in the Faith,
Richard Speck,
President

Fall Conference Well Received, Some New Lessons Learned

By the Rev. Jeff Briere

The fall conference for the Unitarian Universalist Retired Ministers and Partners Association filled our calendar for three days this October. After reading through the comments attendees left in their evaluations, it is apparent that the conference was enjoyable and well put-together. We suffered very few technical issues, and it seems our members are more familiar with Zoom, the technology that makes it possible to meet in cyberspace.

The conference received an average rating of 4.49 (out of 5), indicating overall satisfaction with its logistics and structure. Nearly 80% of us participated at home with our computers, and 60% of us were in the Eastern time zone.

From a little more than 100 responses out of 195 registrations (some were guests), we learned several things:

- Participants found the opening worship service to be a moving and meaningful experience, setting a positive tone for the conference.
- Many appreciated the storytelling theme and personal stories shared during the conference.
- **Connecting Rooms** were more important to attendees than we anticipated: We began Monday with the traditional prompt, “How Is It with Thy Spirit?” One person said, “There was a depth of sharing in my Connecting Room that happened quickly and easily. This has built over time from conference to conference.” Another said, “I enjoyed the small group introductions, perspectives, insights, and expectations. Participants were authentic and engaging. I was delighted to find how much I truly enjoyed these connections at this time in my life. Thank you!”
- We knew **Odysseys** would be memorable for attendees, and we were glad that Anne Spatola and Leslie Westbrook shared their lives with us. Anne presented her Odyssey on Monday: “It was amazing. Anne made such a courageous presentation. I know her, but I appreciated hearing so much more of her story. Anne’s vulnerability and the reminders of the feminist movement and how significant it was in the 60s and 70s were very profound.”
- Leslie Westbrook followed on Wednesday: “Leslie was amazing and wonderful. She is a true exemplar of our faith and how to keep on keeping on despite obstacles.” Another registrant said, “WOW. It’s one thing to know that other women blazed a trail for women like me (who entered the ministry in the 90s), but it’s another thing to hear the experiences and struggles in an ‘up close and personal’ way. I’m deeply grateful.”
- Returning to Monday, that day Richard Speck shared his research with us. His treatment of the work of Vincent Silliman was the catalyst for our theme, “**Stories of the Faith**

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behind Freedom.” Kathleen Rolenz reflected on the theme, as did Carey McDonald, vice president of the UUA, and members of the UU Service Committee, Mary Katherine Morn and Laura Randall.

- Tuesday brought us **several stories of “the faith behind freedom,”** as Wayne Walder introduced storytellers and gently prodded them with questions, encouraging them to suss out meanings in their stories. Tuesday also brought us news of our organization as several officers reported their activities in finance, targeted ministry programs, small groups, passages, and issued a call for nominations for awards to be made at the spring conference.
- Tuesday concluded with **a service of remembrance**, honoring those members recently passed. The remembrance service was produced by the worship team, and they deserve our strong appreciation for heartfelt and moving services. Led by Joan VanBecelaere, they are David Bumbaugh, Ruth Gnagey, Marion Visel, Jef Gamblée, Jan Carlsson-Bull, Sylvia Howe, Lynda Sutherland. Thank you.
- For us, an interesting development came about purely by accident. In conferences past, the times of **virtual socializing** were not well received. But something clicked this time, and attendees used these times to connect with their friends and colleagues.
- On Wednesday, after Leslie’s Odyssey, it was time to wrap up our conference with a review of highlights, a last visit to a connecting room, and the closing worship. Our final connecting rooms had fewer people in them, and as a result, were not as impressive as the ones earlier in the conference. One attendee echoed a sentiment we’d heard before: “We spoke a lot about the experiences of partners in UURMaPA, which was useful. It was a nice conversation overall, but I left feeling that I didn’t have enough time to share what was really on my heart. This is the drawback to a virtual meeting. You come to the end unable to make the connections you may have needed. I don’t know that there’s much you can do about this.”

Our next conference opens April 27 and closes April 29, and our theme is “Keeping It Together when Democracy Is Falling Apart.” Please make plans to join us at that time, either in a pod or in your living room. We will discover what fresh hell awaits us in 2026 (apologies to Dorothy Parker) and learn what we might do about it if we keep our wits about us.

The planning team is recruiting now, as several people are stepping back. If you can help us, (and you can!) please contact Barbro Hansson: barbromhansson@gmail.com or Jeff Briere, jeffbriere@gmail.com.

For this fall conference, we thank the planning team, led by Barbro Hansson, Liaison to the Board and Host. The other members of the team were:

- Anita Farber-Robertson, Connecting Rooms,
- Linda Wright, Connecting Rooms,
- Terry Ellen, Odysseys,
- Wayne Walder, MiniStories,

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- Jef Gamblée, Zoom Second & Tech Chaplain,
- Cynthia Becker, Zoom Master,
- Joan VanBecelaere, Worship,
- Susan Smith, Scribe and Zoom Second,
- Sonya Sulakski, Co-convenor and Host,
- Jeff Briere, Co-convenor and Host, Slide Show and Publicity.

See you in April!

Seabeck Podlings, continued from page 1

Along with the excellent big-screen programming, we enjoyed snacks, beverages and conversation throughout the days and evenings, ate nine good meals in a dining hall that we had mostly to ourselves, learned about each other in our “Show and Tell” session, guffawed in a revealing “To Tell the Truth” session, and took walks around the beautiful campus in the shadow of the Olympic Mountains.

We’ll be at it again in Fall 2026, and there’s room for a few more folks to join us if you’d like the chance to engage with your UURMaPAn peers in a “live and in-person” residential context. It ain’t cheap, but we all feel it’s worth it and folks keep coming — some have attended all four years. Let us know if you might be interested and we’ll add you to the notification list for next year’s event (which begins with Sunday dinner Oct. 18, 2026). Your UURMaPA [webmaster](#) (underlined word links to email) happens to be the continuing event registrar.



Seabeck podlings’ alternate conference posture. For names, see front page.



CONNECTIONS Part I

Want to increase your connections with other UURMaPAns? If so, you are in luck because there are opportunities to connect through General Interest and Focused Interest small groups and the Area Connectors.

1. Join a GENERAL INTEREST ZOOM GROUP

70 UURMaPAns are currently participating in 12 regular Zoom Groups

Though self-governing as to format and schedule, most groups:

- Have five to eight members
- Choose a convener/facilitator
- Meet monthly for a 90-minute session to
 - Open and close with a reading
 - Give each member five minutes to check in or share “How is it with thy Spirit?”
 - Spend remaining time discussing a topic chosen at the prior session and choosing the topic for the next session.
- Each fall and spring, free all to “depart with thanks” or re-commit for six months more.

To explore joining an on-going General Interest Zoom Group, or forming a new one, email Janet Tillman at connections@uurmapa.org.

2. Try a FOCUSED INTEREST ZOOM GROUP (Contact conveners to learn more)

Part A: CURRENT FOCUSED INTEREST ZOOM GROUPS

• Caregivers

Conveners: Makannah Morris, revs2uu@aol.com, Yvonne Strejeck, yesyvonne@gmail.com and Kathleen Ellis, kellis@uuma.org

A Zoom support group for UURMaPA members who are caring for another person meets monthly. If you are a caregiver, you are welcome to join other caregivers for an hour of check-in, shared resources, and caring for one another. Participants covenant for confidentiality. The group meets using Zoom technology, which can be used from a computer, tablet, or smartphone with a camera, or you can phone in. The facilitators will help you get set up to use Zoom if you are new to it. For more information and to join the group, contact a convener.

• Grief Support

Convener: Duane Fickeisen, dfickeisen@uuma.org

An online support group for UURMaPAns who have been recently widowed and are grieving

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the loss of their partner meets monthly. Duane Fickeisen says: *“For an hour and a half, we check in, catch up as we process our grief, and share resources. Each of us grieves in our own way. We offer a safe and confidential space to find support on our separate journeys.”* For more information and to join the group, contact Duane Fickeisen.

- ***Writing for Witness as Resistance***

Convener: Gail Collins-Ranadive, revgcr@aol.com

This group is for anyone refusing to shut down and shut up, as seniors are often expected to do, in response to the chaos, corruption, and cruelty of the current times. Group participants write on a chosen topic to access and then share their knowing, experience, and wisdom, thus creating a record of Truth against “mis and disinformation” we are subjected to daily.

A group doing this work together supports one another’s clarity, courage, and commitment to the challenge of pushing back against the deliberate dismantling of our democracy. *Writing for Witness* is an option for those who are no longer physically able to be on the frontlines in demonstrations, marches, and protests who have a wealth of experience and wisdom to share. For more information and to join the group, contact Gail Collins-Ranadive.

- ***Goddess***

Convener: Sydney Morris, samorris@uuma.org.

The *Goddess* small group is a non-judgmental and confidential gathering that provides a safe space for members to share their life experiences, connect with their feminine energy, and support each other’s personal growth, empowerment, and spiritual development. Sydney Morris (convener) writes: *The Goddess Group meets monthly. We check in, and then go around to answer the question “How has the goddess shown up in your life this month?”* For more information and to join the group contact Sydney Morris.

- ***Partners***

Convener: Janet Tillman, jetillman@comcast.net

A partners’ small group is an opportunity for retired ministers’ partners to:

- Come together with other partners to discuss topics chosen by the group, share personal experiences, and establish a social network.
- Share information that is practical, constructive, and helpful.
- Offer support and encouragement to other group members and receive the same in return.
- Talk openly without worrying that remarks will have an impact on their minister partners in some way.
- Share joyful moments and have fun.

This group is currently at its maximum number. To start a second Partners’ Group, a convener is needed. If you are interested in convening another Partners’ Group, contact Janet Tillman at connections@uurmapa.org.

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Part B: NEW FOCUSED INTEREST ZOOM GROUPS

- ***Penelope's Bones Book Discussion Group***

Convener: Holly Horn, hhorn@uuma.org

This group meets monthly (it started on Nov. 17) to discuss *Penelope's Bones: A New History of Homer's World through the Women Written Out of It* by Emily Hauser. Published in 2025, it is a great combination of imagination, the very latest scientific research, scholarship, feminist and queer analyses.

The group will meet on the THIRD Monday of every month from 1:00pm – 2:30pm Eastern time, 12:00pm, Central time, 11:00am Mountain time, 10:00am Pacific, to discuss one chapter at each meeting. Since there are 16 chapters, this group will go on for a while.

The first meeting was on Monday, November 17, but it is not too late to join the group. After brief introductions and check-in, the group discussed *The Introduction* at its first meeting.

Anyone can join at any time; all you need to do is read the one chapter under discussion for that month. To get involved, find out what chapter is up, or get more information, contact Holly Horn.

- ***UU Mystics Group***

Convener: Lilia Cuervo, cuervouu@comcast.net

The group's purpose is to help its members nurture and enhance their spiritual life, especially by being attentive to the first source of our UU living tradition, *the direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.*

The group meets monthly via Zoom, on the 4th Thursday, at 4 pm Eastern Time, 3 pm Central Time, 2 pm Mountain Time, and 1 pm Pacific Time. Facilitation of the meetings rotates among the members. The facilitator chooses the theme of the meeting and based on it prepares a prompt to guide the reflection prior to the meeting and the discussion during the meeting. This group was formerly offered through a UUMA Chapter but moved to UURMaPA to make it available to a larger audience. To join the group or get more information, contact Lilia Cuervo.

- ***Living and Dying Sustainably***

Convener: James Zacharias, jzacharias1@gmail.com

What are you doing to address the climate crisis? We are told to electrify, electrify, electrify. Beyond that, many of us are left searching for practical steps we can take. This group will address concrete actions that make a real difference. Participants will share steps they have taken such as divestment and green burials. The group is designed to learn from each other by sharing what projects they have engaged in for a cleaner/healthier planet as well as inspiring stories of progress they have gleaned from the media. Together we will explore how we can live - and eventually die - in ways that reflect our environmental values. To join this group or get more information, contact James Zacharias.

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Connect with (or become) a LOCAL AREA CONNECTOR

UURMaPA membership is clustered into 35 Geographical Areas.

In 17 Areas, there are Connectors who:

- Welcome newly retired and new-to-Area UURMaPAn's,
- Offer support to survivors at an Area UURMaPAn's death,
- Participate in annual check-ins with UURMaPAn's in their Areas, and
- Facilitate other connection opportunities as moved by Area colleagues' spirit and energy.

To find out if your Area has a Connector go to <https://uurmapa.org/resources/#Area-Connectors>.

If your Area has a Connector, contact them to learn about Area activities and to seek connection and support as needed.

In 18 areas, Connector activity awaits your initiative to become an Area Connector.

If your Area has no Connector, email Janet Tillman at connections@uurmapa.org to explore how to partner in the ministry of being an Area Connector.

Thanks to all the Small Group Conveners and Area Connectors who make our meaningful connections possible!

Janet Tillman, Connections Coordinator



UURMaPAn Eleanor Richardson spotted this elderberry bush near her home. Thanks for sharing it with us, Eleanor!



CONNECTIONS Part II

POSSIBLE FOCUSED INTEREST ZOOM GROUPS

As Connections Coordinator, I am exploring additional focused interest groups to more fully address the interests and needs of UURMaPA members. Ideas for groups are:

- ***Navigating Aging Together***: Supporting each other as we handle social, cultural, physical and/or mental challenges.
- ***Living on the Edge***: Supporting each other as we deal with financial challenges such as rising healthcare costs, reduced or fixed incomes that may not keep pace with inflation, accumulation of debt from previous decades, falling victim to financial scams, managing the costs of senior living, and adapting finances after the loss of a spouse.
- ***LGBTQIA+***: This group would offer LGBTQIA+ a safe space for thoughtful discussions related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA+) issues. A space to foster support and sustain collective agency and thoughtful collaboration.
- ***BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)***: Provide a safe, supportive space for connection, discussion, and healing from racial isolation and oppression within organizations and communities. Participants can openly discuss their experiences with racism, oppression, and privilege in a way that feels emotionally safe, free from judgment or the burden of educating others.
- ***A Living Library***: A group where participants become “books” and are “borrowed” by “readers” (other participants) to have a conversation, allowing individuals to share their unique life experiences. In this format, the “books” (participants) share stories and wisdom from their lives.
- ***Color Outside the Lines***: Small group for artists or “aspiring” artists of all genres for the purpose of igniting, encouraging, and celebrating creativity. Discussion topics could be art projects individual members are pursuing or want to pursue, mental blocks to starting or completing artwork, anxiety about sharing creative works, finding the time to make art, setting goals, and gently holding each other accountable for achieving desired goals.
- ***Book Discussion Group (Novels)***
- ***Book Discussion Group (Non-Fiction)***
- ***Poetry Group***

If you would like to convene any of the above groups or have an idea for a focused interest group you’d like to convene, contact me at connections@uurmapa.org for assistance starting the group.

Janet Tillman, Connections Coordinator

Announcements

Save the Dates

UURMaPA Spring 2026 Conference,
April 27-29

UURMaPA Fall 2026 Conference,
October 19-21



One of Perth, Ontario's beautiful heritage houses, surrounded by trees in all their fall beauty. Photo by George Buchanan.

Obituaries

Dorothy Meek

ARLINGTON, TEXAS – Dorothy Meek passed away on Sept. 4 after a long, good life. Born Dorothy May Caldwell in Boston, Massachusetts, on July 21, 1933, she was the fourth of six children of Rita and Ralph Caldwell, who raised them in the Boston area, finally settling in Medford. They attended Medford Hillside Universalist Church, where Dorothy taught Sunday school and sang in the choir. After graduating from high school, Dorothy got a medical secretary degree at Mount Ida Junior College.

It was at Medford Hillside that she met Alexander “Scotty” Meek, an intern from Crane Theological School, and they married in 1956. Their son Stevan was born during their time at the Orange, Massachusetts, church, and their daughter Sherry joined the family while at the church in Lynn, Massachusetts.



In Lynn, Dorothy found her calling—working with children.

Over the years, she cared for countless preschoolers in the many communities her family called home. Summers included time at Ferry Beach, the UU retreat center in Saco, Maine, where the family built lifelong friendships and memories by the ocean.

In 1983, after raising their children in Lynn, Massachusetts, and Rochester, Minnesota, Dorothy and Scotty served a series of interim ministries across the country—and even one in New Zealand. They lived in places as varied as Brooklyn; Little Rock; Houston; Laguna Beach and Kansas City, always returning to General Assembly, which they attended faithfully for over 50 years. They cherished the camaraderie and good friends they found there.

For fun, Dorothy loved games, crafts and puzzles. She was a master cribbage player, and the dominos inevitably fell her way. She liked all sports, and their frequent moves gave her many “home teams” to root for. For many years their home base was Sun Lakes, Arizona, where they enjoyed being part of their desert community. After Scotty’s death, Dorothy moved to Arlington, Texas, to be near her son Steve and his wife Lynn. She looked forward to visits from grandchildren and daughter, Sherry.

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Dorothy Meeks, continued from page 13

Dorothy was preceded in death by her husband and siblings. She is survived by her son Steve, daughter Sherry and grandchildren. As a memorial, please be kind to small children and large animals—especially giraffes. Donations in her memory can be made to [Ferry Beach Retreat & Conference Center](#), 5 Boardwalk Drive, Saco ME, 04072.



Fall splendor in Perth, Ontario. Photo by Carrie Buchanan.

Book Corner

By George Buchanan
Elderberries Editor

I have two books to commend to you in this issue. The first is this recently published volume by fellow UURMaPAn Tom Owen-Towle:



Living with Purpose and Integrity: A Fresh Perspective on the Ten Commandments

Description:

Although 3,500 years old, when wisely and caringly reimagined, the Ten Commandments can nourish our inner spirit and guide our outer conduct.

This historical Decalogue provides a coherent moral and spiritual framework for our modern times. *Living with Purpose and Integrity: A Fresh Perspective on the Ten Commandments* is just what we need for healthier and holier living.

Author:

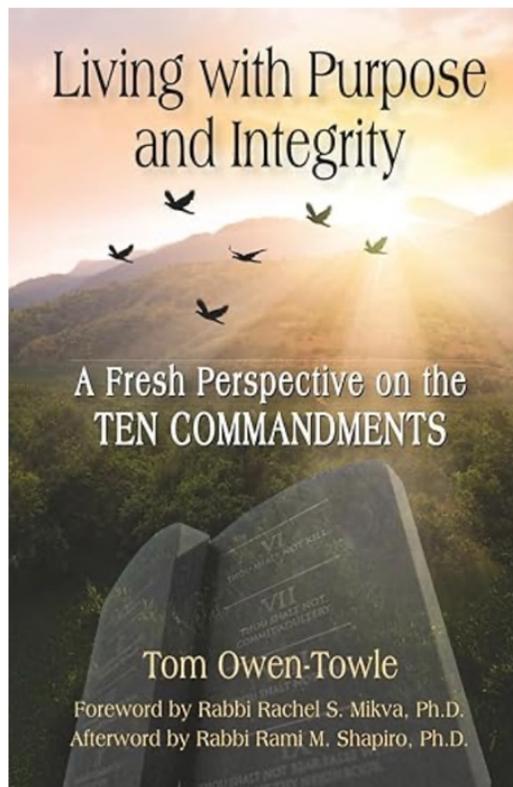
The Rev. Dr. Tom Owen-Towle is entering his 58th year of ordained ministry and is the author of two dozen books on personal relationships, social justice work and spiritual growth. Rev. Owen-Towle has dedicated this book to his wife of 50 years, Carolyn, who died in 2023, amidst its very creation.

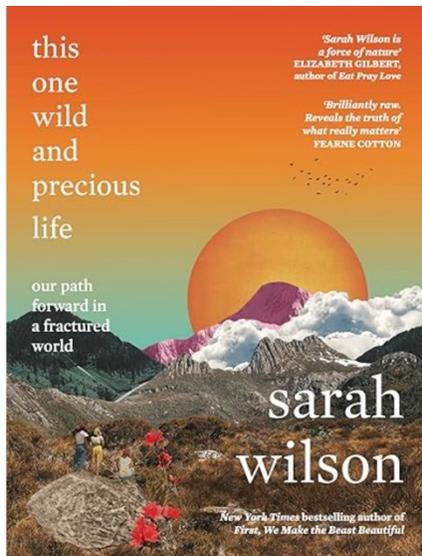
Acclaim:

“Rev. Tom Owen-Towle wants to bring the Ten Commandments ‘up to date,’ to demonstrate their abiding relevance for skeptics and believers alike. Tom shares slivers of his story to inspire our own honest reckoning.”

Rabbi Rachel S. Mikva, Ph.D., editor of *Broken Tablets: Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves*

Available: at uuabookstore.org or amazon.com





This One Wild and Precious Life: Our path forward in a fractured world

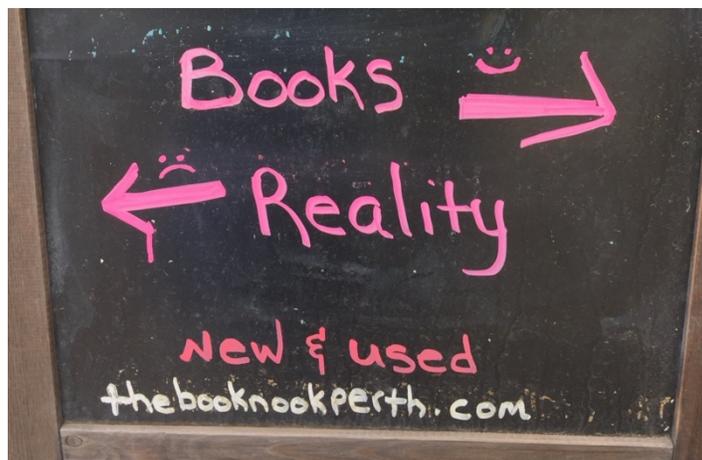
By Sarah Wilson

The second book I'm recommending is by Sarah Wilson, a writer and activist from Australia. In this book, she considers the existential crisis humanity is facing — climate, weapons of mass destruction — and suggests ways for individuals to respond.

The book is interwoven with lots of complex ideas. To give you a flavor, here is a summary of just three of her many suggestions:

- Walk and hike outdoors as much as you can. Much of the book is narration of hikes Ms. Wilson has made all over the world. She tells us about these expeditions and how they have helped shape and sustain her life. Most of us have more limited resources than she has, but the value of her suggestion here is still clear.
- Seek out deep meaningful interconnection with others. She notes our modern tendency to be superficial in our relationships. She encourages us to do what we dimly understand to be most satisfying in relationships.
- Be "Soul Nerds". By this she means spending time attending to music and poetry and other materials to sustain and nourish our souls. As Unitarian Universalists, we know she is preaching to the choir here.

The book has many more good ideas. I heartily recommend it to anyone with time and energy to tackle the big problems facing humanity.



Sign outside Perth bookstore. Photo by George Buchanan