

*Good Morning. My name is Beth Munro, and this is my "Journey of Faith."*

My family was very involved in church and then it vanished from my life as quickly as my mother who died at age 36. I was eleven and learned families stop going to church when they blame God for loss. I missed assisting at Sunday School, seeing our church friends, and the stained-glass, storytelling windows. I was confused: Was it, or wasn't it a SIN to stop attending?

After that question, others I'd learned to NOT ask resurfaced! How could rules about going to confession EVERY week make me tell one of the few lies in my childhood? (*I'd done nothing bad the first week, so I made something up. Then, I had a lie to confess!*) And why insist in a NIGHTLY prayer that I might "die before I wake?"

In college, agreeing to be a bridesmaid for a childhood friend, it hadn't occurred to me that the rehearsal would be my first time back at that church since my mom's funeral. At the door, I handed my bouquet to my 6'4" boyfriend. PARALYZED and softly crying, I **insisted** HE stand in for me. By the next day, I was fine for the wedding, *but those rehearsal photos were odd!*

After that, I tried various churches -- Catholic, non-Catholic, ones without music -- like a scientist subtracting one variable at a time. It was CHURCH making me cry, always a reminder of my mother's death and unanswered religious questions.

When friends asked me to become a godmother to their baby, I was surprised. They knew I'd stopped *even trying* to attend church, yet said, "You are the kind of person we want as *Godmutha*." I called the church **begging** to meet with a clergyman with the biggest hat who could see me! I asked him, "How can *I* possibly be a godmother?" He replied, "Asking for this meeting is enough."

Later, engaged to be married, I **still** thought church was out of the question. My husband found a Justice of the Peace with a wee chapel in her yard. It even had stained-glass windows!

I met a Pastor who entertained my questions. I thought I'd found a church...UNTIL I realized he believed salvation *or lack thereof* was pre-determined. Then, in TWO different towns, I **almost** attended Unitarian Universalist churches to learn about this faith, yet in the end couldn't make myself attend any kind of church.

While house-hunting in THIS area, I noticed something surprising—there were no lost mittens on the ground. *ALL had been placed on fences or branches*. I told my husband, "Kind, community-minded people live here. We should, too."

In 2009, we moved to Newbury, and I found spirituality in the tenets of a new career. As a Life Coach and Organizer, I believe in non-judgment, the value of questions, and that the answers lie within. When I heard of FRS, I phoned friends to "go public with my goal." The **next** Sunday, I stepped through these welcoming doors. There were *no stained-glass windows?!...yet...I didn't miss them*. I felt CONNECTED to the world, not SEPARATED from it. The Affirmation of Faith, Doxology, Benediction, and Historical Affirmations rang TRUE. FRS felt like a home for heart and mind. I cried a little, yet...could still report SUCCESS! Then, the minister said, "Have a nice summer" and announced the seasonal closing of FRS. *Whaat?!* I decided to label having TO START OVER in the fall as "*a good test*"--rather than a cruel joke.

Since then, my journey at FRS has included classes in Spiritual Autobiography, History of Unitarian Universalism, and Soul Stories. Facilitating Chalice Circles has also enriched my experience, and I'm in a Service Project to exchange letters between residents of "red states" and "blue states" to build understanding.

I never imagined I'd JOIN ANY church. Yet, a recent class about membership confirmed my desire. I'm now a Member of this beloved community. I was seeking a church that wouldn't make me cry. Here, I've found much more...among people who display lost mittens with care. My journey continues.