

When I first started thinking of what I was going to write and share for this service, two things immediately entered my mind. One was the long summer car trips I used to take with my kids in my “previous life.” The other was that everyone should have a Magic 8 Ball.

Two very disparate thoughts, how DO they connect???

In essence they, don't. The trip is an analogy for my spiritual filled journey that has brought where I am today, to this church, and THIS place.

I used to plan and take long car trips during the summer months with my three kids, the longest one being 7,466 miles over the course of 2 months. THIS journey that we are taking today, won't be nearly as long, there IS a time limit after all! ;-)

As we move through this journey, you'll see how the Magic 8-Ball fits in.

I am the middle child of 8, the first born female born into a Roman Catholic family. By age 7, I was playing at being a nun with my younger sister...I am sure this play was influenced by my upcoming First Holy Communion.

I would bet dollars to donuts, that if there are any former RC women here today, they likely played at being a nun too. It's what little Catholic girls did. 😊

At age 8, I remember dreaming of Jesus, dreams that I kept to myself. They were special to me, I felt like He was my special friend. When I shared my dreams with a classmate, I never had

another one. The sense of loss I felt was profound and I would wonder if I would ever have that kind of dream again. (**Magic 8 Ball** answer – “Don’t count on it.”)

In the fourth grade, I transferred from a Parochial school to a public elementary one meaning that religion was no longer part of my daily schooling, but a once a week class, CCD, taught by well-meaning volunteer parents from the neighborhood church. Now that learning “God Stuff” was on MY play or free time, and not just another subject in school, resentment of having to attend began to build, and I questioned the need to go.

Truthfully, this was the onset of my questioning the faith that I was raised in. Why, became a recurring question for me at this time. Why do I have to go, why do I have to pray with words that are NOT mine, why couldn’t I just enjoy the great outdoors and appreciate God’s beauty?

Clearly a fissure, which allowed for other why questions....why doesn’t dad go to church, why do our neighbors go to a different church, you mean they are not Catholic??? Why did baby Jeffrey die, why do bad things happen to good people, and conversely, why do good things happen to bad people? Life, clearly was not fair, it certainly was NOT black and white and it was CONFUSING. I will admit, over the years, I have come to very much appreciate the color, “gray.”

By the time I hit my teen years, I was exploring a few other faith traditions, Judaism, Non-Denominational Christianity, and

Buddhism. This exploring was more work that I wanted to give it and took me out of my comfort zone, so I defaulted back into my faith of origin where I stayed put until this square peg could no longer fit into that very round hole.

Is it difficult to question your religion, almost your entire life when you hit your early to mid-40's? (**Magic 8 – Ball** answer – “Without a Doubt.”) But in the end, that is just what I did.

For several years, I roamed with no spiritual goal in mind. What felt like, “nothingness,” in the end did not suit my inner me. At this point, I realized that self-reflection would help determine what I wanted or needed out of a religion or spiritual movement. It was something that I knew I would have to define for myself.

I have learned that as one matures, life experiences often challenge and alter one's beliefs, and I fully expect that where I am NOW in this journey is NOT my ultimate destination. I think of it as a stop along the way, much like when I visited the Grand Canyon, Carlsbad Caverns, and Garden of the Gods amongst many other travel stops on my two month trip years ago.

At my current destination:

I believe in the inner goodness and beauty of humankind.

I believe in graciousness, allowing for human error and giving people the benefit of a second chance.

I believe in kindness, no matter how small, it is important. Like concentric circles in a pond when you toss in a stone...the

further away from the impact – or act of kindness – the farther out the result of such a kindness can ripple.

I believe in love – Do I really?? (**Magic 8-Ball** says “Signs point to yes!”) I believe that love, in all its various forms, is truly one of life’s greatest gifts. Love, means being accepted for who I am, warts and all. It’s a two way street, being yourself, accepting others as they are, and appreciating the differences.

“Accepting the differences,” is key to me. Having lived the majority of my “previous life” doing as I “should,” and living by the family or church rules was so confining. I am quirky by nature, and I have a tendency to be somewhat irreverent. Being myself now, without hearing regular sighs of “disapproval,” or worse, “BARBARA!!!” was, and remains, freeing. As I said, I am loved for who I am, warts and all and, while not perfect, I try to accept others the same way I want to be.

I believe that we can live in peace – A tall order in today’s day and age, but I believe if PEACE, itself, becomes THE goal it can be achieved.

While there is no way to actually prove God, Allah, Krishna, Yahweh exists, it feels right to me, and gives me comfort, to take that leap of faith and believe in such a higher being. Many names, one God.

Gandhi said, “Belief in one God is the cornerstone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only

one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion.”

I believe that faith and science can co-exist, but religion cannot have any scientific claims.

I believe that one’s worth as a human is determined by their actions and deeds not by the sum of their bank account. I am reminded of the biblical story, which resonated with me, and still does, Mark 12:41-44, “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

*Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

I believe in the gift of wonder, recognizing the beauty and marvels of our world, be it, the mountains, lakes, rivers, fields of flowers, sunrise, sunset, puppies, kittens, new baby or the wrinkled hand of an elderly person. These everyday things, I don’t take for granted. I believe in stopping and smelling the flowers along the way. I believe the little things in life are what can make life truly meaningful. Quite often when I am out for a walk, I get side tracked by the walk itself and get lost in the beauty around me.

I believe that more unites us, than separates us as we age. One of my favorite poems by Shel Silverstein illustrates this. The first time I read it I thought of my grandfather, who was 93 at the time. My then two year old, would crawl up into his bed and they'd cuddle together...both of them wet at the end of the visit. It goes like this:

Said the little boy, "Sometimes I drop my spoon."  
Said the little old man, "I do that too."  
The little boy whispered, "I wet my pants."  
"I do that too," laughed the little old man.  
Said the little boy, "I often cry."  
The old man nodded, "So do I."  
"But worst of all," said the boy, "it seems  
Grown-ups don't pay attention to me."  
And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand.  
"I know what you mean," said the little old man.

That poem reminds me that regardless of age, creed, belief system, etc., that respect and being treated with dignity is key. It costs nothing and means so much.

I believe in all that is good and the possibility of goodness in everyone.

And while I hope that the Warriors win the game against the Cavaliers tonight, I believe that God does not care who wins that game or any other.

Over the years, I've been "accused" of seeing things through rose colored glasses or that I have a "Pollyanna" tendency. Maybe this is true, but for ME, I have learned that I would rather see the positive and believe in the positive and the possibilities of what CAN be, than what is NOT or may not.

I believe putting all my beliefs into regular or daily practice can be, and is a significant challenge. Do I succeed every day? No, I don't. I fall down from time to time, more often than I care to admit. That said, I continue to pick myself up, brush myself off and try, try again.

At this time, I know the road I am currently on, I am going in the right direction for ME. While it sounds like a simple road, in practice it is not.

I do appreciate the opportunity to share with you where I am on my journey. Will I take side trips? (**Magic 8-Ball** says, "Most likely," but the main path is pretty well set.)