

Self-Empowerment

Autumn 2003

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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A MOVING EXPERIENCE

Was I having a stressful situation? Yes! Selling my old house and buying a new house presented many challenges to test my patience, faith, and equanimity.

One year ago I had the first stirrings of the desire to move. Although I had lived happily in that house for over 11 years, several changes in my work, in my relationships, and in the neighborhood gave signals that I had outgrown my house and it was time to start looking for something different. The establishment of Agape Interfaith Ministries, my daughter's graduation from college and subsequent move to Denver, and my engagement to Rick were just the big ticket items. There were lots of other signs which seemed to say, "Get ready, get set, go!"

On June 1, 2003 Rick and I found *the* house – on *Friendship Street*. Wow! The name of the street was icing on a wonderful cake, as the house met all my present needs. Within days we had an agreement of sale to purchase it and an incredibly low mortgage interest rate. Then, only 10 days after putting my house up for sale, someone fell in love with it and made an offer which I accepted. Everything seemed to be a speedy and effortless flow toward the targets of a mid-July move into the new house and the sale of my old house two weeks later. Have you ever heard the expression, "Man plans and God laughs"? All was not to go as I had planned.

After several delays and rescheduled settlement dates, my wonderful mortgage, I then learned (to my surprise) had a requirement that my old house had to be sold before the new one could be purchased. So the two settlements (once again) had to be rescheduled to happen on a later date, back-to-back on the same day. Oy! Difficult? But do-able, right?

I made countless calls to reschedule everything again: telephone, gas, electric and cable companies and everyone else involved with this move. Mail was being delivered prematurely to addresses not yet settled. The clock was ticking and my fiance's son was to be registered for the school in the neighborhood where we did not yet live. Choosing appropriate actions from an attitude of peace and faith instead of anxiety and panic was a tall order, but one I was committed to making.

Then things got even more challenging. The mortgage company (of the woman buying my house) kept making excuses for further delays. Meanwhile, the person selling the

new house to me was getting nervous and threatening to put the house of my dreams back on the market. Ouch! My real estate agent was an angel, beautifully fielding lots of calls from all the players in this drama. (God bless him!) What to do? Pray!! Hey, this was going to need a major miracle. Deadlines had been passed. There appeared to be much to lose.

"A true friend is a gift of God."

One day in the midst of this real estate drama, one of my close friends called me to find out how things were progressing. I explained that the newest settlement date was imminent, but there was a missing piece that threatened the purchase of my new house: no mortgage commitment from my buyer. Concerned about my situation and feeling the love that moved her to wanting to help, she offered what's known as a swing loan. Now it's not every day that someone is willing to lend me \$65,000! Oh, my – I was overwhelmed. To be the recipient of such an offer was mind-blowing!

I have been fortunate over the years to enjoy loving relationships in which there is mutual caring and sharing. Over 30 years ago, a friend of mine who now lives in New Mexico gave me a gift of a framed cross stitched message which reads: "A TRUE FRIEND IS A GIFT OF GOD". I have always appreciated that message and knew its truth. Although I ultimately decided not to take the loan from my friend, to have such a dramatic and timely demonstration of true friendship, in the midst of such a difficulty, was so heart-warming. Gratitude welled up in me for all of my friends and fellow truth seekers whose caring and support mean so much.

I was feeling like I was on a roller coaster, hitting highs and lows with each turn of this real estate process. With all the roadblocks and delays that were appearing, there were equal numbers of signs of support showing up in unexpected places. The offer of financial help from a friend was indeed one of several miracles that became available.

Then the worst happened – we got the news that the buyer's mortgage company did not approve her mortgage. Now it was not just a matter of days to settlement, but a whole new set of circumstances to respond to. It was a sad experience for my potential buyer who expected to move into my house in a few days with her young son. It was a disappointment and a delay for me, but one I felt sure was

not going to stop me. I recognized many gifts within all the circumstances that were happening, many of which could fill a book or two. In the midst of all this, a major plumbing repair to the old house had us living in extremely difficult surroundings – piles of boxes and bags with packed up belongings were now covered with the dust created by the reconstruction of the wall torn out to make the repair.

Despite the turn of events, it was clear that faith takes us to new levels of handling whatever challenges need to be met. We did that, and did it well.

What did I do? I switched to a different more expensive mortgage, allowing the purchase of my new home without having to sell my old house first. Did I suffer over the loss of the lower priced one? Well, maybe a little...but I let it go relatively quickly and stopped comparing what *could have been* with what *is*. One of the great secrets of letting go is simply the choice to use one's mind constructively instead of destructively. There was nothing to be gained by obsessing about the lost percentage points. There was much to be gained by accepting the present facts and moving on to buy the wonderful house I now live in – with my brand new husband and son.

Wedding Bells

Only a few weeks after moving into the new house, we held a lovely wedding ceremony right there in our new home! What a great new beginning. We were highly motivated to unpack boxes and get the house ready for guests. It was an intense time of changes, yet overall the move was handled with grace. I also had the experience of feeling my emotions appropriately while sweating in the heat (moving in August), feeling angry about mishandled items, feeling overwhelmed fitting two sets of furniture into one house, and at times just plain out-of-control about unknowns, setbacks, financial changes, etc. It was indeed a humbling experience.

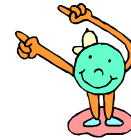
When viewed with the strength of faith, the move unfolded absolutely perfectly in its own way, regardless of what I thought would be good or bad. As you will see in this issue, the story of “Good Luck, Bad Luck” brings home the idea that we really don't know what is good or bad when we don't have the full view of all the facts.

Also in this issue is an interview with Rev. Pattie Chiaffa, the Interfaith Minister who officiated at my wedding. I am eternally grateful to Rev Pattie for the sacred and joyful ceremony that we were able to share with those closest to us. It was an added bonus that we were able to honor my parents' 60th wedding anniversary at my own wedding, only one day after theirs.

Some stress? Yes, but dealing with some big changes is a great opportunity to test one's faith. By practicing faith, I was delighted by the solutions to each challenge and the many expressions of love and support that flowed in.

For me, spirituality in everyday life needs to be

practical. I am ready to receive the miracles. And I am grateful for the abundance of love and joy.



Blessings, Love and Hugs!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

Wedding Ceremony of Jill Sabin and Rick Carel

Following is an excerpt of the wedding ceremony performed on September 20, 2003 by Rev. Patricia Chiaffa. Using the book *Weddings from the Heart* by Daphne Rose Kingma, Rick and I wrote a ceremony that reflected our shared beliefs and bridged our individuality.

We are gathered here to celebrate a marriage, a spiritual union that embodies love's most profound possibilities. Love is the highest spiritual work. Love is the strongest power there is. Love, kindled by romance and clasped by heartfelt marriage vows has the capacity to deliver a joining from being merely a domestic arrangement, a supportive partnership, and an emotional bonding, and elevate it into a spiritual enterprise.

To speak of marriage as a spiritual enterprise is to view it in a slightly different way than normally, and certainly not simply in a romantic light. For when we speak of marriage in spiritual terms, we are inviting ourselves into it, and it into us, at a much higher level. To participate in a marriage of this kind is not only to enter into it as the estate that will bring us happiness, but to see it also as the spiritual crucible of transformation, of suffering, and also of great joy.

Therefore, as you step into marriage you must remember first of all that marriage is a process of transformation. Because of it, inside of it, and in response to it, you will change most remarkably. And not necessarily or exclusively in the ways you had hoped for or imagined. For marriage is the spiritual grinding stone that will hone you to your brightest brilliance. It will cause you to become not only who you wanted to be, but also the person whom you have no choice but to be. In marriage you will be reformed, for in choosing this particular person to love and make your whole life with, you are choosing to be affected. You will be polished through the actions of your beloved upon you, through the praise, criticism, frustration, excitement, actions, and inactions of the person you marry today.

In this regard it is important to remember that, more than you can possibly imagine, you are unconsciously drawn to precisely that person who possesses the attributes you need to be affected by in order to change. These are the very qualities that, because of their capacity to irritate and inspire

you, will encourage in you the very dimensions you lack, the qualities that, as you acquire them, will represent an enlargement of your soul. What this means, simply is that in spite of yourself you will be drawn into a process of personal evolution. Whatever is missing in your character will gradually be developed, and what's remarkable about this transformation is that in the end, rather than feeling bitter, resentful, or unwilling, you will come to see the acquisition of these attributes as an exquisite refinement of your spirit.

This is a spiritual process because it deals not with the superficial aspects of your personality, how you dress and what you eat, although changes in these areas may also be part of the process, but with the deepest essence of your being and, ultimately with your capacity to love. You will learn to be kinder, or more gently critical, to be empathetic, or more trusting. For whenever we are bound by our own emotional limitations, whenever we have judgments or cannot come into the presence of our own generosity or compassion because of our woundedness, there, certainly, we will be met in marriage. We will be met in the character of our beloved, with an invitation to transcend our own limitations, our judgments, our stinginess, our lack of trust, our fear of intimacy, our pride, our self-focus, our self-righteousness, and strive for their beautiful opposites, to reach, in short, for our capacity to love.

For it is love, of course, true love, unconditional love, the love of the tree for the earth, the love of the bird for the air, the love of God for creation, that shatters all limitations, that dissolves all fears. This unconditional love is the true gift of marriage, its greatest, most spirit-embracing work.

To know that marriage has a high spiritual purpose is to be willing to share both sufferings and joys. Sharing life together in spiritual union, you will have the opportunity to halve the shared pain and double the shared joys. This is the blessing of spiritual partnership. Rejoice and be glad, be exuberant and playful, bask in the companionship of the person who delights you. Despite the challenges you may someday face, it is joy that brings us to marriage. For it is the joy of all joy, the infinite joy, which in its finite form a marriage symbolizes. For joy, unlike happiness, which is merely an emotion, is a state of being, a spiritual condition. To suffer the challenges of marriage is also to deliver yourself to its joys, to joy itself. And it is thus, in the spirit of joy, that we welcome and bless Jill and Rick to the spiritual undertaking that is marriage. Long may it stand as the cathedral of their love.

Dear God, look upon your children, Jill and Rick, and be generous with them, so that in the unfolding veils of time, they may truly stand for one another as emblems of the incarnation of Your love. Give them a sense of joy, excitement, possibility, and challenge about what they are undertaking here, the ever-unfolding and beautiful work of

refining their spirits in the presence of each other's witness, of becoming the bearers of your love.

And knowing that this is a high and often difficult work – that its rewards are uncommon and often invisible in ordinary day-to-day life, we pray for them the benediction of company, the encouragement of witnesses, the boundless joy of living always in the midst of love.

Give them peace and strength so they may honor the vows they make here today. And may the promises they make inspire and instruct each one of us who celebrates with them. Amen.

Interview: Rev. Pattie Chiaffa

This interview took place in the middle of this past summer and focuses on Pattie's personal spiritual journey.

Agape Interfaith Ministries (AIM): What were your childhood experiences of religion/spirituality?

Rev. Pattie Chiaffa (PC): I was baptized into the Catholic Church as an infant and educated in Catholic Schools. My experience of religion was one of remembering lots of rules.

My overall view of God was that of a distant score-keeper out there in the sky somewhere ready to strike me down with every wrong move I made. Considering the list of mistakes I made over the years, I sure gave Him plenty of reason to "strike". While no clobberings came my way, I felt shame and guilt as a result of my "sins." We were told that we were loved and at the same time, as sinners, we were unworthy. I often felt confused, not only in childhood, but also as an adult. I was really blessed, though, because in second grade, I entered into a close friendship with a girl who was very spiritual. To this day, I believe Cecilia to be a Saint, as well as a gift to me. She is the perfect example of someone being an instrument for God. I likened her to the Blessed Mother. I have had devotion to Mary throughout my life.

I also think that the popular idea of prayer at the time of my growing up Catholic, was one of petition. I, for one, misunderstood this method and felt as though I was unworthy in God's eyes if I didn't have my prayer answered (in exactly the way I wanted it, of course). I think this mentality paved the way for the victimhood I developed in my adult years when things didn't go my way.

Since then I have experienced big changes. Much growth and freedom resulted from exploring other

approaches of prayer. To address Our Creator from a knowing place of love and gratitude, desiring the highest outcome for the good of all involved, allows for miracles and fosters a loving relationship with the Divine.

AIM: Were there times that you felt disconnected from your spirituality?

PC: I felt as though my spirituality was episodic. Reception of the sacraments for the first time as a child, marriage, child birth and baptisms were opportunities of renewal for me.

Generally speaking, however, up until about 13 years ago, I can truthfully say that I frequently felt disconnected from my spirituality. Today, I recognize that it was because I continually looked outside of myself for happiness and wholeness. The very thing I most needed, to look within, was frightening for me because there was a huge void. I was in so much pain – emotionally, spiritually and physically. Nothing filled that emptiness, and it hurt.

About 13 years ago, I volunteered to host a Women's group at my home. I was introduced to terms like "victim," "self-empowerment," "healing."

Something began to shift for me. I began reading material focused on wholeness, like Louise Hay and Joan Borysenko. I started attending workshops on communication. I attended Science of Mind services and classes, subscribed to Unity's Daily Word, immersed myself in New Thought, and participated in A Course in Miracles study group. I sought counseling. Over time I developed a

spiritual practice through which I developed a personal relationship with God. This time my spirituality was based on love, not fear, and it has made a significant positive difference in my life. I recognize that God's spirit is nearer than my very breath itself. I know that I live and move and have my being in God. I am filled with gratitude for every person, place and thing in my life. I have experienced God's love and forgiveness as I have opened to forgiving and loving those I found difficult to love and forgive, including myself.

AIM: Tell us about the religious training you are currently receiving. What do you plan to do with that upon completion?

PC: I am currently a second year student in a Philadelphia Archdiocesan program known as the Church Ministry Institute (CMI). The CMI is a three-year program that prepares Catholic adults to assume active roles in their parishes and communities.

Upon completion, I hope to have a clearer vision of where I want to perform my service ministry. During my first year, I volunteered at St. Francis Inn, an inner city soup kitchen. If anyone questions where God is, direct them there. He is serving the poor through dedicated volunteers. Over the next 2 years, I will be involved in prison ministry and AIDS ministry.

The amazing outcome of all the years of exploring various expressions of spirituality has been for me an "inner stirring" to commit to expressing God through Catholicism.

AIM: Do you foresee a full-time religious/spiritual career in your future. Tell us about what you envision for the use of your training and talents.

PC: I plan to make spirituality my full time way of life. My highest aspiration is to "Be" the message I would like to communicate. Having gained an awareness of how much pain people carry, I would like to facilitate workshops or meetings that would focus on healing. In so doing, I will have an ongoing opportunity to monitor my own thinking, and continue releasing and forgiving.

AIM: How do you apply your spiritual understandings to your everyday life, in your work, parenting, being a good neighbor, and community service?

PC: I attempt to remember and carry God's loving presence with me into every relationship and situation I encounter each day.

It is upon reflection on my childhood experiences of Catholicism that I have a broader understanding than before. There is a wealth of guidance within Catholicism that I joyfully turn to. Yet I needed to search elsewhere first in

"I have great respect for different paths to Truth."

order to find it. As I explored other spiritual paths, I found much of what I was looking for in my own religion of birth. Much like the outcome of the Wizard of Oz story, I

needed to follow a yellow brick road, of sorts, which eventually led me back "home". The depth of God's Love that I had not completely felt back then was not really "missing", but needed a more mature faith to recognize. It's like I'm hearing messages that were there all along, but I was unable to hear yet.

I have great respect for different paths to Truth. And I look forward to the many ways that I can bring my deeper spiritual understandings to my family relationships, my work and all my activities.

AIM: What do you think is the most important spiritual message that you wish you could share with others?

PC: I would like everyone to know how magnificent it is to be a Child of God and for them to truly believe that they are of God and to be open to all the wonderful, unlimited opportunities that entitlement holds.

Yet, I don't want to sound like I think I've "got it all together", or that I'm a saint. I'm still struggling at times, like everyone else, to see God in the midst of challenging circumstances. When I remember to look for the "gift" in challenges, however, I am rewarded with insights that bring the experience of God's Grace and Love.

Good Luck? Bad Luck?

There is a Chinese story of an old farmer who had an old horse for tilling his fields. One day the horse escaped into the hills and when all the farmer's neighbors sympathized with the old man over his bad luck, the farmer replied, "Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?"

A week later the horse returned with a herd of wild horses from the hills and this time the neighbors congratulated the farmer on his good luck. His reply was "Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?"

Then when the farmer's son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses, he fell off its back and broke his leg. Everyone thought this very bad luck. Not the farmer, whose only reaction was, "Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?"

Some weeks later the army marched into the village and conscripted every able-bodied youth they found there. When they saw the farmer's son with his broken leg they let him off. Now was that good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?

Everything that seems on the surface to be evil may be a good in disguise. And everything that seems good on the surface may really be an evil. So we are wise when we leave it to God to decide what is good luck and what bad, and thank him that all things turn out for good with those who love him.

Anthony DeMello
Mastering Sadhana

I received the following forwarded email from an anonymous source about the various circumstances that led to many people being unable to make it to their jobs at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Applying the idea of "Good luck, bad luck" can change the way we perceive mundane challenges.

Subject: Little things with a purpose.

After Sept. 11 ... I happened to call a man on business that I didn't know and have not, nor will ever, talk to again. But this day, he felt like talking. He was head of security for a company that had invited the remaining members of a company who had been decimated by the attack on the Twin Towers to share their office space. With his voice full of awe he told me stories of why these people were alive and their counterparts were dead, and all the stories were just 'little' things.

As you might know, the head of the company got in late that day because his son started kindergarten.

Another fellow was alive because it was his turn to bring donuts. One woman was late because her alarm clock didn't go off in time. One was late because of being stuck on the NJ Turnpike because of an auto accident. One missed his

bus. One spilled food on her clothes and had to take time to change. One's car wouldn't start. One went back to answer the telephone. One had a child that dawdled and didn't get ready as soon as he should have. One couldn't get a taxi.

There were other stories that I hope and pray will someday be gathered and put in a book. The one that struck me was the man who put on a new pair of shoes that morning, took the various means to get to work but before he got there, he developed a blister on his foot. He stopped at a drugstore to buy a Band-Aid. That is why he is alive today.

Now when I am stuck in traffic, miss an elevator, turn back to answer a ringing telephone... all the little things that annoy me, I think to myself, this is exactly where God wants me to be at this very moment.

May God continue to bless you with all those annoying little things and may you remember their possible purpose.

Pass this on to someone else, if you'd like. There is NO LUCK attached. If you delete this, it's okay - God's love is not dependent on e-mail.

Daily Word

The peace of God within me uplifts and sustains me.

There is always a reservoir of peace within me because God resides at the center of my being. By letting my thoughts of God lead me to that center of peace within, I take a rest from all the confusion and activity around me.

Getting in touch with the peace of my soul, I send a message of quiet to my whole being. The serenity I feel is washing away all tension from my body. Peace moves out from me, and I interact with others calmly and confidently.

In times of both unusual and everyday happenings, I remain tranquil. I contribute to the peace in my relationships, my home, and my workplace. The presence of God is a peace that sustains me at all times.

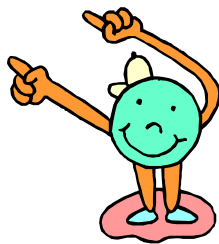
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Agape Interfaith Ministries has a new home in NE Philadelphia. We hope to see you at upcoming study groups and events.

Two great new CD's to add to your collection of inspired music – LEW DOTY and JODY KESSLER

Singer/songwriter Lew Doty is pleased to announce the release of his first CD, "One." His songs range from the deeply contemplative to the outrageously joyful.

"If you want a real trip in the celestial harmonies, let Lew Doty sing for you. You'll love his CD." – John Randolph Price

To order "One" send \$17 (incl. shipping) to Lew Doty, W-11, 2049 Barnsboro Rd., Blackwood, NJ 08012. Will be available in Nov. 2003 through Amazon.com and CDBaby.com.

Singer/songwriter Jody Kessler is pleased to announce the release of her 4th CD, "Bare Bones" which is a balanced mix of songs that are funny, poignant & inspiring, with an eclectic blend of musical styles that range from traditional folk to klezmer-bluesy to country twang to acoustic funk-rock.

"Jody's music opens the heart we share." – Stephen Levine

To listen to soundclips and order "Bare Bones", visit www.jodykessler.com or send \$16.50 to In the Moment Productions, P.O.Box 4054, Ithaca, NY 14852

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Cost: No fee



The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.



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