



THE GREEN LAKE FOUNDATION

THE GREEN LAKE FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

“God save the foundation!” (Shakespeare)

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Feeling God

by

Karen Baker

At the Green Lake Church Retreat of 2018 held at the Walla Walla University Marine Biology Station (Rosario Beach, WA) Karen Baker spoke about her spiritual journey. It was a forthright and sensitive reflection of her evolving understanding of faith and the mystery of the human condition. Her insights resonated with a number of listeners, and she was encouraged to submit her reflections to Spectrum to inspire a wider audience.[†]

When I was young, God was revealed through the Bible and miracles; I knew nearly all the answers to whatever Bible trivia games my school or Sabbath School ever had. Speed Bible-text searches? I crushed them. God was always watching. We went to church to feel Him more and show our respect. My dad was a pastor, so we were at church a lot. There was also a lot of Adventist pride here: we had the truth, we had deciphered all those strange prophecies, we knew what God really wanted; if we trusted in Him, we could get more miracles. Oh, and we should be ready for persecution and running to the hills, but God would protect us and make up for it in heaven.

There was fear and comfort in these confident, concrete interpretations.

Time passed; I got older, and my God focus had a greater Jesus emphasis. Jesus was our friend. He cared for everyone and loved them. He wanted to talk with me every day, and He totally enjoyed praise bands.

More time passed. Y2K filled the news, and people worried that with the upcoming millennium, life as we knew it would end. As it happened, mine did. In the havoc of the changes taking place in my life, good people, people of faith, people dear to me, people who had been my spiritual guides, became sources of turmoil. I think they really felt



they were holding on to truth and goodness, but under the cloak of their religion lay fear, anger, hurt, and a desperate need for control. The Bible became weaponized with bullets of scripture and Ellen White falling all around and through me. I was left with a lot of

fragments of experience and belief that no longer knit together the way they had before.

I didn't have certainty and miracles. I had loss, and grief, and doubt.

So I journaled. And read. A lot. And journaled about what I read. And talked with friends who were also reading and journaling. I am something of a compulsive quote-collector, and these many volumes are probably half collected quotes and half personal musings. So far I have filled 22 volumes and counting...

Being human is amazing, and exhausting, and mysterious, and earthy, and complicated, and dirty, and so very humbling and educational. I needed a God, a faith, a way of being, that could embrace all of those things. One biased for compassion, for connection, and for nuance.

For the first several years I didn't know that was what I was looking for. To be honest, I had no idea what I was looking for.

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To quote myself about 15 years ago:

“For me, it is more than just [a pull to stay with] a familiar culture. There is almost a sense of obligation, a great need to pursue this quest, to stick with it somehow, to find a way to make it work, make it fit. And so I keep reading, keep compiling stories and new spins to add to old theories, hoping that if I just stick with it long enough, like Goldilocks, I’ll find the faith that’s ‘just right.’”

Here are three quotes I have on the next page. Quotes I would probably still jot down today. But I think when I first wrote them down it was with wonder and longing. And now they are more comfortable, more of an expression of my thoughts, too.

Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart....
Try to love the contradictions themselves.... Live the contradictions now. —Parker Palmer

Be aware of draining the mystery out of the scriptures in a misplaced desire for rational consistency. Hence, I have learned to live with incompleteness, paradox, incomprehensibility and deep mystery in my relationship with God and as I think theologically. —J. I. Packer

Recognizing and appreciating God as mystery—as opposed to God as defined by facts and proofs—can be an important step. God’s hiddenness and absence make sense only in the context of mystery. As I contemplate the stories of so many who have walked away from faith, it occurs to me that they have walked away not so much from God, but rather from a mistaken perception of God.
—Ruth Tucker

When I feel God now, it’s sometimes the transcendent moments that I think many can relate to: those awe-inducing things like a sublime landscape, a beautiful piece of art, or stunning architecture. Music.

Of course music. I have this wonderful memory of singing a hymn with the Unionaires that Dr. Lynn had sort of dubbed our anthem. We had sung it many times, but it was always moving. By the time we made it to the last verse we were so tightly united in the emotion of the piece. Each crescendo. Each fermata. The music was playing us, coming out of our souls, uniting us in this gorgeous experience. Something so much more than just simply four parts being sung together. It

was something bigger, deeper, more mysterious. Transcendent. Sacred.

This same sense of connection to something outside of myself happens in such an assortment of times/places that I don’t have a “thing” *per se* where I experience it. The wonder hits my heart, which then swells so that there’s less room for the air in my lungs. Sometimes it happens in a moment that feels full of importance. Other times it sneaks into the mundane and catches me completely unawares, but is no less powerful or holy. Miraculous, you might say.

*An honest conversation with friends,
smelling the air on a crisp autumn morning,
snuggling with my girls,
seeing someone’s pain and reaching out to them,
holding hands with strangers to circle Green Lake in the name
of acceptance and love,
marveling as a child figures out a new skill,
crocuses blooming through the snow and mud,
watching a parent and child delight in each other,
sitting next to someone I love.*

I think it comes down to connection. I believe that there is a sacred connection between all of us and everything around us: the lily of the valley, the lost sheep, the neighbor we should love as ourselves, the stranger within our gate, the crying child, the heartbroken friend, the asylum-seeking immigrant, the transgender classmate, the Muslim next door.

We can practice looking out for this connection, and maybe get better at seeing it and feeling it. And then reach out and pluck it and feel God resonate with the strumming.

† Published in *Spectrum* November 14, 2018 (<https://spectrummagazine.org/>).

Karen Baker works as a pediatric physical therapist and is constantly touched by the love and resilience of the families she works with. She continues to sing, read, and collect quotes with her husband and two daughters. ✧

A CONVERSATION WITH SIMON TUNG

On June 25, 2016, Simon Tung was interviewed by Ken Walters. Edited for length and clarity.

You have been a Green Lake member for more than 50 years and have a record of conscientious service to our church family. Where and when were you born?

I was born in China in 1944, during the Second World War, in the province of Sichuan on the western side of China.

After the War, there was a civil war in China between the communists and the nationalists. Since my father had worked for the government, we went to live in Hong Kong for two or three years, then moved to Pakistan around 1949 when I was four or five years old.

Why did your family move to Pakistan?

My father and his friends had an idea for a cottonseed mill to produce cottonseed oil near Karachi, Pakistan. I lived in Pakistan until 1964.

You were introduced to the Adventist church as a result of a tragic event for your family.

In 1956, my mother got ill and was taken to the Karachi SDA Hospital. Unfortunately, she passed away from complications in early 1957. But it did get our family introduced to Seventh-day Adventism. I was 13, with three younger brothers.

Your father was left with four boys without their mother. That must have been devastating.

It certainly was. It was something extraordinary for children to go through.

What can you tell us about your mother?

She was probably brought up in at least a nominally Christian home. Her family had a farm in the Shanghai area, and I can vaguely remember spending some time there. It was an interesting place.

After her death, you started attending the SDA church in Karachi?

Yes, we did. The activity I remember most is the Pathfinder club, which had both missionary children and those from the congregation participating. I loved Pathfinders.

You were sent to boarding school at some point?

Yes. I lived in dormitories. The first college was called Forman Christian College, a Presbyterian institution. I studied the engineering side of science as opposed to the

biological side. It was a pre-engineering program. Then I transferred to West Pakistan's University of Engineering and Technology.

How did you come to the U. S.?

My father recognized that there was not a whole lot of future in Pakistan, and he said, "You know, we really should find an Adventist college for you to go to." Walla Walla College was the one that had an engineering curriculum. I came to Walla Walla in 1964 and graduated in 1967 with an engineering degree.

What was next?

My first job after graduation was with a consulting and manufacturing firm in West Seattle. The firm specialized in lumber-drying kilns, something quite specialized.

How did you go about finding an Adventist church to attend in Seattle?

I did visit a number of churches in the Seattle area. But visiting Green Lake, this church particularly struck me. I decided to start attending regularly, and I moved my membership here.

How did Green Lake win the competition?

It was the members. I saw that they were open. A lot of the people at Green Lake were educated enough to see things from different viewpoints. One of the first people I talked to was Lyle Jensen, who was a professor at the University of Washington.

Did you attend Lyle Jensen's Sabbath School class?

Yes; it was one of the larger classes, and we met in the chapel.

Who was the pastor?

Magne Fuglheim. He had a fresh look at things. I found the sermons to be very interesting, carefully researched in one way or another. I was very much attracted to his preaching.

Who do you especially remember from Green Lake in 1967?

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A Conversation with Simon Tung, *continued*

Elsie Weaver was here. And Hanna and Hal Helmersen. Of course, the Jensens. Another couple I knew was the Batchelders—she was officially the Bible Worker for the church.

At some point you made a career transition from lumber-drying kilns to water quality issues and public health.

My interest in public health actually started with a chapel program at Walla Walla College. A speaker from Loma Linda University talked about public health and said that engineers were needed in public health positions.

So you found a public health job?

I got a call from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and they were looking for engineers to go into the Water Supply Waste section. I was working at the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission at that time.

A short time later you left this position to study at UW?

I had the opportunity to go to the University of Washington and study public health, environmental health in particular. I finished the program in 1975 and went back to Water Supply Waste in DSHS in the Seattle office, housed in the Smith Tower. That was a nice place to work, with some history and prestige! In 1979, I accepted a position at a newly opened office in Kennewick, Washington. However, that office closed in 1981, and I was transferred to the Olympia office of DSHS; I've lived in Olympia since 1981.

You've had many responsibilities at Green Lake. In fact, you drive from Olympia in time for Sabbath School since you've been Secretary of the Sabbath School for decades. At one time you helped lead the Pathfinders.

Yes, with the Pathfinders I worked with Mr. Qvigstad, and both David and Arne Helmersen were enthusiastic Pathfinders. We did a lot of fun things—campouts, team projects, learning skills—things like that.

When were you drafted to help count the offerings and make the deposits?

Verla Kwiram was the official treasurer of the church at that time. I was asked to help, and pretty much have been doing it ever since.

You've been the mainstay of the Walk-Through-the-

Bible class for many years, first as a class member but more recently as the leader.

Katie Jo Johnson may have started the class. Dr. Lyle Jensen and Dr. Paul Johnson were teachers. We would basically read the Bible and see what it says to us today. That was the original goal of the class, and still is today. Before he passed away, Lyle Jensen asked me to be the leader of the class.

You share that leadership today?

Yes, Matt Rickaby also teaches the class.

How do you decide what books of the Bible to discuss?

We've been through the Bible more than once. We probably spend more time in the New Testament. My particular favorite is the letters of Paul since he was building a church from scratch, and he had to contend with both Jews and Gentiles.

What has happened to your brothers who were left in Pakistan when you came to the U. S.?

My father managed to get all the kids out of Pakistan—me to the U. S., my brothers and sisters to Australia. I have two half-sisters from my father's subsequent marriage. My father moved to Australia, too.

Special thanks, Simon, for your longstanding dedication to our congregation, for your service to our church community in so many roles and ways, and for being the hands-down winner of the "longest commute to church" competition. We are grateful to have you as our friend and fellow church member. Generous members like you really make Green Lake the special place that it has always been and remains today. [Applause] ✧



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