

“Of You We Sing”

Celebrating Jacqui, A Minister's Offering
by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull
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Cohasset, MA
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Jacqueline Beauregard Clark, colleague and friend, teacher and leader, we do sing of you. We do lift our voices and open our hearts to say thank you for all that you are and all that you have been. We take our instruments in hand to play for you melodies and refrains to remind you of the melodies and refrains you have played for us.

In the familiar words of your own poetry, it is good to remind you that you have indeed worn your beads “and danced on earth's soft face,” that you have given life and “helped children to their feet.” You have done and been so much for this congregation, during the good times and the not so good times. You have been our graceful glue. You have been our tested teacher. You have been an exemplar for grace when life didn't always serve up a large batch of grace.

I remember you telling me of how Ed Atkinson, minister of this congregation for 29 years, tapped your shoulder a few years after you joined and said something like, “Jacqui, we need you to lead our religious education program!” Your response was quick, I think. “Yes,” you said, simply, “Yes!”

Throughout the 16 years of your leadership of First Parish's religious education program, throughout the many more years of your membership in this congregation, you have been teacher, nurturer, holder of unfolding history of this congregation and the lives that take root here. You have watered well the young seedlings of this parish, giving each your radiant smile and your assurance that you cared for them, each by name, and most from their earliest days.

Then again, there are some down sides to the complex and lively person that you are. I recall hearing from you early on that you loved winter! Now it takes a certain hardy soul to love winter, especially here in New England, but I know you do! How can I forget when you and Sandy and I headed into Boston to meet Bobby for a staff holiday dinner in the North End? Of course it was snowing. Of course the goddess of South Shore weather was having another tantrum and aiming that snow right smack into our faces as we stepped off the ferry, leaned into the wind, and headed to the North End, where you served as our completely knowledgeable guide. Did you moan and groan about bad goddess behavior? Oh no! I dare say you reveled in it, with your elegant Russian hat planted firmly on your no-nonsense head and your feet planted firmly in your ready-for-whatever hiking boots. You made it quite clear that winter was to be savored. Summer is quite another matter. There must be some lessons here as you bemoan a warm sunny day, a perfect beach day, as you pine for a chill in the air, a drop of snow, maybe even some frost when summer is in her otherwise full glory.

I learn from you every day, Jacqui, just as our children do, just as our teachers do. I learn also that you are a woman of many talents – a poet who takes the raw material of words and spins them into images that ring true and lovely; a reader who relishes your quiet time ensconced in something as light as, well, *The Brothers Karamazov*; a high performing matchmaker who knows the fit between person and place as your realtor star continues its upward climb; and yes,

a mother who probably does know where your children are at 10 PM – even though they are no longer children; a grandmother who frets about a grandson venturing on his first trip abroad; a friend who listens deeply and cares constantly; a wife who knows the meaning of constancy; and ever an educator, who knows how to “help children to their feet” as they stretch from infants into toddlers into middle-graders into teens into young women and men.

I would remind everyone here that Jacqui is retiring only from her position as Director of Religious Education. She continues to work hard to match people and place in her labors as realtor. She continues as visible and accessible friend and neighbor and member of this parish and this community. She continues to stretch the arms of her soul around people and words and around this coastline that she loves so much – mostly in winter, of course. So when I stumbled across these words of poet Mary Oliver, whom I know you esteem highly, Jacqui, I stopped and gathered them into my words to you this morning. They are, aptly enough, from her essay entitled *Winter Hours* from a collection by the same name:

“I could not be a poet,” she writes, “without the natural world. Someone else could. But not me. For me the door to the woods is the door to the temple. Under the trees, along the pale slopes of sand, I walk in an ascendant relationship to rapture, and with words I celebrate this rapture. I see, and dote upon, the manifest.”

So it is, I believe, with you, dear Jacqui. You tread attuned to the sacred space of this coastline, with its woods and rocky outcroppings, its tidal rhythms and its Nor’easter winds. You take it all in as you take in the life of this parish, young and old. You braid your word-friends into wondrous poetry. You teach what you wonder at. And you dote upon the manifest, with a heart that is ever large and warm.

For all you are, I am grateful, Jacqui. Thank you! We love you! Of you we sing!

Sources:

Jacqueline Beauregard, “From Song to Echo,” in *How We Are Called: A Meditation Anthology*, Edited by Mary Benard and Kirstie Anderson, Skinner House Books, Boston, 2003.

Mary Oliver, “Winter Hours,” in *Winter Hours: Prose, Prose Poems, and Poems* Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1999, 98-99.