

## **This I Believe Statements**

Coming of Age Sunday ~ May 6, 2018

Unitarian Church of Montpelier

### **Special thanks to...**

... both Coming of Age facilitators, Julie Curtin and Mara Iverson.

... the Coming of Age guides Margaret Blanchard, Anne Ferguson, Steve Grunewald, Scott Hess, Elizabeth Peebles, Deb Robinson, Peter Watt, Becky Webber, and Amy Willis.

... the parents and caregivers who supported the youth and the program all year!

... the congregation as a whole for their support of this program and their warm reception of the service and the statements the youth put together.

### **Samantha \***

I believe in kindness. I believe in kindness because that is how I believe I can change the world, that it the person I want to be, and that is what guides me to “rightness”.

What I mean by “Kindness guides me to rightness” is that when I am living my everyday life, I think about this. Kind of like a motto. I face situations, especially at my age, where society has me stuck between difference of opinion, and liverish people. For example, I have experienced people telling me that my parents will be punished for being gay. In this situation, as you can imagine, I was frustrated. All I wanted to do was make sure this person knew how angry I was at them for saying something so wrong. But I just had to step back and ask myself these questions: “What is the kind thing to do in this situation?” “Why are they saying these things to me?” “Is it kind to hurt someone else and tell them they are wrong even if they are saying hurtful things?” “What is their intent?” With processing the situation, I didn’t lash out. I handled it in a calm way. My calm reaction turned out to be more effective than if I were to yell at the person.

Everyone has a way that they want to positively impact the world. Some want to save endangered species, some want to rid the world of sin, some want to spread love and justice. However small or large, we impact everything around us. My small step is to set a chain of happy, like the “pass it on” idea. I want to do everything I do with love, through small acts--like smiling at someone new, extra checking on a friend that has been having a hard time, cleaning the house before mom gets home... I still need to practice that one. But my idea is to make as many people's day through kindness so that again, I can set a chain of happy. This is what I believe in.

\* Last name withheld by request.

### **Eliana Eckhaus**

I believe in science and logic. I believe that there are some things that are improbable, but not impossible. I believe that not everything can be seen or even imagined. This makes me question things, like the existence of a god, or greater being.

I believe in something happening after death, maybe reincarnation, rewinding back to the beginning, or even just ceasing to exist. The idea of simply not being aware is hard to think about. That might be why I lean towards reincarnation, because it is more appealing than just not being anything. Not feeling, or thinking, or existing. I recently saw a study online about death, and it showed that after death, there are 7 more minutes of brain activity in the area that processes memories, and that is the brain playing through the memories of your whole life. It made me think about the reality of death, and how no one knows what happens after death, so any ideas people have about death could be right or wrong. That is also why I don't believe in a god. There is nothing that shows or proves the existence of any, and I have a hard time truly believing in unknowns. Also, the idea of gods or goddesses is all a human concept, and we were certainly not the first life on earth. While there may be something greater out there, I don't believe it is watching over me.

I believe in taking care of other people. I was always taught to see other people's perspectives, and that is what I try to do in my daily life. I believe in second chances. I think that everyone should get another chance at everything, because people's views and beliefs can change constantly.

I believe in growing and learning. I know that my beliefs and views will change with time, so this is just a temporary statement about my current beliefs.

### **Charlotte Friend**

What happens when we die? Do we become something we love, like zebras? (I love zebras.) Or a tree or some leaves that are left on the cold ground, or some pretty autumn leaves waving in the wind? Or some green tall grass whistling? Do we become another person as a chance to live a life? I believe you don't just die and go up to heaven, I believe you become something or become another human being.

I have had a few important people that have died in my life. One was Hedi Ballantyne was a long time member of this church. Hedi was a great person in my life. Others who have died were Poppi, my grandfather, and my two dogs, and one cat. I think Hedi became another person that gets to have another life from the last one, because she was so kind to kids and other grownups. I think Poppi became a raven because he loved them so much. Every time I see a raven near our house I think it's Poppi. My dogs, Basil and Sage, loved chasing small animals, especially chipmunks. I think they became hunting dogs together, hunting chipmunks. Kitty, my cat, loved sleeping in the warm sun. I think she became a lizard sleeping on a warm rock.

I believe that each time the person or living thing dies, they come back as doing the thing they loved most. So, when the raven that was Poppi dies, he'll come back as whatever the raven loved most like seeds or sitting on an oak tree. Or flying in the warm summer days. If you love being an engineer you might become someone that makes robots and make amazing things. I believe that if you haven't been a good person in

your life, you'll still come back, but maybe as something that will help you learn a lesson, like how to be a better person.

If I'm going to come back as something that I love, I might be a zebra or a famous dancer on America's Got Talent. Or an Olympic gold medalist. Or a writer or a person that helps kids that have a hard lives. I feel death can be very sad. Losing someone you love can impact your life forever. Also, it can be happy because you know they aren't suffering. Thinking about the good things that might happen when we die--like becoming something or someone we love--helps make death less sad.

## **Tia Leno**

I believe in family. I believe that family is the most important thing in our lives because no matter what, your family will love and support you. Family is about love, strength, and a little friendly competition.

Family is about love. In August 2016, my family started fostering two little boys, Mason and Noah. My mom's friend was fostering them before us and very busy preparing to move, so we offered to help with the boys for a couple of days. The next thing we knew, we fell in love with them and a couple of days became 10 months. Mason and Noah got to know us and felt comfortable with us, so when my mom's friend was going to move, we took them in. My whole family loved them and we had a lot of fun with them. Eventually they were able to live with their parents again and they moved away. We haven't seen them in a while, but they are still in our hearts and I hope our paths cross again someday.

Another big part of family is strength. This past December my great-grandmother died. Grammie meant more than can be put into words. She was there for each of us since day one. Her continual love and support helped us through the tough times, but the toughest time of all was losing her. The day she died, all of my family gathered at her house. Together, we had the strength to face her loss.

What's a family without a little competition? My family is full of competitive people. My family has this thing we do. We joke about being each other's favorites. My mom likes to tell me I'm her favorite, then I remind her I'm her only. Abbie is the oldest of my cousins and the rest of us fight over who is her favorite. It's mostly in fun, but on some level we are serious because we care about each other so much, and sometimes it drives us to be sweeter, kinder, and more generous.

These are a few of the many reasons why I believe in family.

## **Otis Loga**

I believe in coming to church.

I come to church mainly to get out of the house and talk to interesting people of all ages, shapes and sizes. I also come to church because I like to sing, even if I am terrible at it. I like the messages of the songs. I love church because it is close to both of my houses. From my mom's house I can bike to church. If I am at my mom's house, going to church pulls me off the couch and drags me away from the TV. At church I go to the Bell Tower Room for Middle School RE and do fun things. I liked when we wrote letters to people in prison to wish them happy holidays. I liked knowing that someone who couldn't go home to see their families or sit around the Christmas tree would at least get a card from me. After I wrote one letter, I wrote another to a homeless guy that I've seen on the streets here in Montpelier. I'm still looking for him to give him the card, or at least say hello.

I believe in coming to church because our congregation is welcoming to all sorts of people. I feel welcomed and like I belong when I am at church. I like that people actually talk to me and are interested in what I have to say. Church is community for me. We don't tell people they have to believe in this one tradition or God. We don't tell them they have to pray to this God every night. One of my favorite parts of going to church is the coffee hour and snack afterwards, and talking to the community. When I am here, I feel content and satisfied. I believe in coming to church.

Thank you.

### **Jane Miller Arsenault**

I've found the lifestyle that I hope to live one day. This past February, I was a member of the Planting Hope multi-generational trip to San Ramon, Nicaragua. We planted hope for 11 days, and I harvested awareness that I will carry with me for my entire life.

I learned that a car is not a necessity, nor are outdoor chairs in addition to indoor ones. Because plastic chairs are great for both places. And I now know it is possible to live with one framed photograph on the wall, because memories are stronger than paper behind glass.

For the past two years or so, I've been designing the straw bale tiny house I will build and live in one day. Something I've known even before my trip to Nicaragua is that I want a small, simple, but unique house with a lot of character. In my mind, it makes complete sense, because it is good for the environment and less expensive. More importantly, I personally don't need a lot of possessions to continue living a rich and happy life--just like my Nicaraguan host family.

I believe in having opportunities to see different lifestyles others lead around the world. Education, the news, and photographs can only take you so far. You need to experience the way other people live, using as many of your five senses as possible. Like the feel of thick rainforest air on your skin, and the smell of pico de gallo for breakfast. It is traveling with a positive purpose. I believe this experience is not only valuable for watching and learning, but for reflection and, if necessary, change-- to change habits, thoughts, usage of time, and more. And you don't know what it could be for you, until you go on your own adventure.

If I was in charge of the world, I would give each person the opportunity to travel internationally once in their lifetime at the cost of zero dollars. I've already had so much come out of my most recent international trip including strengthening my commitment to

helping the environment, and a friendship with Amy, Donald, Cesar, Gabriel, Kenner, Yerlis, and Ian Lucas--my Nicaraguan host family.

This I believe.

## **Anna Neuburger**

One thing that I believe strongly is giving everyone a voice and listening. Everyone deserves a voice. When everyone is free to speak without judgment or prejudice we can listen and overcome our personal thoughts to improve our understanding of important issues. One reason people don't listen is because of a closed mindset. With some issues, people won't listen to facts because of what they've been taught about the problem before, or what they think about the person because of petty issues.

One time I saw someone use their voice to make a difference was when my friend, Jules and I made pamphlets. The goal of the pamphlets was to make people who are non-binary conforming feel more safe and comfortable in the classroom. Non-binary conforming means gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine. One of the teachers came to meet with our group, the Gender and Sexuality Alliance. She said that she noticed that her curriculum was very gendered, and asked us to come up with a more gender-neutral way to split the class. We decided that it would be helpful to talk about what they/them pronouns are and all that jazz. After we made the pamphlet, we went and met with the math teachers from each grade and taught them how to be less gendered in their teaching. That was one situation where listening to someone helped inform teachers about youth and how to be more comfortable in the classroom.

Another time I used my voice to make a difference was when I stayed silent. In the same student group--Gender and Sexuality Alliance-- I was on the Day of Silence Committee. The Day of Silence was when we stayed silent for the day to show support for those who can't speak up about their identity. First, we had to convince the administration to let us host the day of silence. Then, once we got closer to the date, we made sure to speak out to everyone who would listen about the Day of Silence. We got

a total of 99 sign-ups of people wanting to show support. At the end of the day we held a ceremony where I was asked to read a story to empower the crowd. It was really symbolic and powerful, in my opinion, and I am glad we started this tradition at the Montpelier Public School system.

In conclusion, I have learned from firsthand experience what it's like to use your voice and be listened to. I feel as though if everyone spoke up even just a little the world would be a better place for all.

## **Anja Rand**

I believe that having a positive attitude helps to have a fun and happy life.

The Ben and Jerry's quote "If it's not fun why do it?" has always spoken to me and my family always jokes that is my life motto. I love having fun in everything I do I don't think that what you are doing necessarily has to be fun but the attitude that you bring should be positive. When you have a positive outlook on something you are more likely to enjoy yourself and be happy.

The other day I came upon a story of a guy living in the slums in India. He didn't have a lot of money and his house was simple yet he thought he had a wonderful house. He said that he had a bed and the breeze flew through nicely. Despite his living and working conditions he was a really happy person. He wasn't worried about how much money he had, the little things made him happy. In this case it was his attitude that made the difference.

I believe helping others is a happy, fun life too. My family and I have been lucky to take a few service trips to Nicaragua and Haiti. In Nicaragua we brought many soccer balls to the kids and played soccer with them. The soccer balls were not something that the kids got to play with every day. It was rewarding to see how happy the kids were to play soccer.

When we went to Haiti, we visited an orphanage, and held the babies there. The workers and the babies really appreciated it. The workers could take a break and the babies could get held and have some attention. This wasn't very easy, it was sad to see that there was no one to love the kids as much as our parents do. We also got to play some games with the kids. We played some soccer and did some coloring with them. They loved having people to play with but, it was sad to see how the workers weren't paying much attention to them. The kids both in Nicaragua and Haiti live hard lives and are a lot less fortunate than us, but we can share our happiness with them. I believe that having a positive attitude helps you live a fun and happy life. Not only should we learn to appreciate the small things in life but we should use our happiness to help those who are less fortunate. This I believe.

## **Fiona Rollins**

I believe that fear is okay, that it can be good to be afraid of some things. I believe that fear is healthy. We view fear as an enemy, but I believe it is a tool. We don't always need to overcome our fear. We just need to acknowledge and understand why it is there. What does it mean?

I believe fear is a good thing and that we need it, but I also know it can be manipulative and controlling. But that might just be HOW we use it or WHO is using it. For example, if we didn't have fear we could just go up the side of a mountain without being prepared, and probably just fall and get seriously injured. But if we have too much fear then we would never climb a mountain and see all the amazing views and scenery.

We have to use our fear to help us and to understand how things work. For example, when I was little and was starting softball, I was scared to be the pitcher because it is the center of attention. But I ended up doing it and now I want to do it all the time. Another example is when I went on a zipline. When I got up to the top of the zipline I didn't want to jump off for while, but when I finally did I was so happy I did it.

When I thought about the question “What makes you fearful?” I immediately thought of when I don't understand people, or when people don't understand me. When some of my friends get bullied for any reason, I wonder how someone could treat someone in a bad way, or a different way? But that is just because I don't understand how they think. Have you ever thought that when you think someone is doing something wrong that they think they are doing it right? Most times, if someone treats someone “badly” they think it is okay to treat them that way. Us UU's like to say that we will welcome anyone and all, but to what extent? If there was a person that was completely prejudice, or wasn't treating someone “the right way”, if they came into our church, would we welcome them all the way? Would we let them speak their mind and have a “voice and vote”? If we didn't, would that make us prejudice because we are judging them by what they believe? These are the questions I have been trying to answer for myself because I believe in always trying to understand.

### **Jasper Turner**

I am 13, and I don't contemplate my beliefs too often. With the help of all the Coming of Age discussions, I was able to pull out some important values. After thinking for a while, 3 central ideas struck me, those being empathy, art, and humor.

I believe that feelings are important, and when I see someone's feelings getting blindsided or hurt I usually feel that inside me. This “insight” if you will, is a tool that I use throughout my daily life, and it helps me comfort peers and keep my family peaceful and mindful. Empathy involves seeing things from others perspectives, which is something I try to do. A good example of seeing from another's point of view, is an artist named M.C. Escher. M.C. Escher was a European artist in the early 20th century who, and is famous for his perspective bending works. One of my favorite pieces is a self portrait of him looking into a reflective sphere and seeing himself and the world around him from other eyes. His works show empathy with perspective, which he was great at changing and bending so everything could be seen. That is a big part of empathy, seeing through others' eyes.

It's no mistake that I connect empathy to an artist and the way he saw the world, because I myself am an artist and empathy plays in to my artwork, as well as how I am feeling. Escher's creativity links to me and my art in a way that shows the whole scenario of my mind on the canvas or page. Art is my tool for expressing emotion and life. I try to capture the spectrum of emotions in my art, just as I catch the spectrum of colors, and my favorite emotion to draw is humor.

Humor is my last belief. I try to find a smile in every day, and put it into cartoon when I can. I believe in humor and happiness because it keeps us afloat on a sea of hardships, like when I hear about the horrible things happening in the world, I cheer myself up by thinking of happy things. Don't get me wrong, I recognize the bad things in the world, but I try to find a balance between ignoring it and paying way too much attention.

I believe in empathy, art and humor. This I believe.