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*Together, we keep this boat afloat.*

### *Buoyant!*

A Boston Kreme donut can rocket your spirits to the moon, and the most inconsequential thing – catching your pinkie toe on a chair leg – can send them plummeting....

In October, our friend Ellen Wilson went into the hospital for a “You should do this sometime” procedure. It did not go as planned, and we have been checking in and remembering Ellen during Joys and Sorrows ever since. I’m delighted to report that, having been homebound and hooked to a feeding tube for some nineteen weeks, she has turned the corner.

Last week – and I share this story with her permission – the doctors gave Ellen the go-ahead to begin eating real food – but only very slowly, with small sips of tea and mindful breathing in between every tiny bite. Her first food? A Boston Kreme donut! She texted from Dunkin Donuts that day: “I’m in tears over a donut.”

When we talked last week, Ellen sounded higher than a kite. She had moved on to omelets and Stouffers spinach soufflé. “We’ll have to peel you off the ceiling.” I told her, “You embody buoyancy!” Yes, she said. “I am beyond excited. I’m joyful.”

Buoyancy. Energy rising. Like bubbles in a shaken bottle of soda, shooting upward. Like the foam on an ocean wave, breaking off and floating into the air. Frothy. Bouncy. Bubbly. Light.

Spiritually, it doesn’t get any better than that joyful, buoyant feeling. You know it. When we have a eureka moment or a fantastic idea that excites us! Or when we’ve finished a project at last! Or when we’ve worked hard getting ready for a trip and are buckled into the seatbelt, someone else in charge now. We feel buoyant when, after weeks of inching our way back to health or recovering from a mishap, we wake up one day finally feeling like ourself again.

Mellow buoyancy delights us, too – the sense of floating, feeling held, borne along on a river of well-being....

But life messes with our sense of buoyancy. We mess with it, too! Just the other morning, I woke up preoccupied and unsettled about an ongoing conversation. Later in the day I spoke up about it, which helped restore my equanimity. But in the process, it turns out I hadn’t taken others’ feelings into account, which disappointed both them and me. (We don’t always see the impact of our words and actions.) What a rollercoaster – because then, Paul came back from the post office with the great news of \$50,000 in pledges!

We crave the feeling of buoyant well-being. Especially in a world that can feel rushed and stressful. What keeps you afloat?

Over in Portland, the Float Harder Relaxation Center offers two float pods and two float rooms! “Floating,” they say, “is now used around the world for relaxation, stress relief, muscle recovery, pain relief and meditation....”

In a floating or sensory deprivation tank – the water is heated to skin temperature, and large quantities of Epsom salts create more buoyancy. It is said that an hour of dark, silent weightlessness, away from the outside world’s sounds and sights, produces a deeply relaxed state and enhances creativity, clear thinking, spiritual insights, inner peace.

Thankfully, we don’t have to go to Portland *or* get wet to restore our buoyancy! We can invite it. I’m talking about spiritual practice. Regular, daily spiritual practice. A practice or a variety of practices that suit you.

One of the most valuable assignments for me in divinity school was, for a whole semester, to devote thirty minutes a day to spiritual practice. The professor had a broad definition of “spiritual practice”: anything that might invite into our lives *sweetness* or *spaciousness*. Part of the assignment was to write a sentence of two about each day’s practice.

I read over those sentences the other day, grateful for the reminder of those half hours of meditating, poetry, writing, drawing, listening. I share some notes:

September 14, 2010 Meditating, I experienced themes of a door hinging open, hunger, thirst.

9/18 Wrote to the prompt “cup of tea” and traveled to spaciousness, to what can I reliably count on, to holding and being held.

9/19 Finished off a yard project. Did not find the level of sweetness I’d anticipated but appreciate pulling myself back to intention.

9/21 Meditated in the car, dog panting. Emerged moderately more spacious.

9/23 Watched the golden moon, with Jupiter rising in the east bright, appearing close. Sounds of crickets chirping and birds splashing. My body slowly unwinding.

9/24 Procrastinated ‘til after dinner. (If you’d had a rough day, why, Betsy, did you wait?!) I wish I had given myself another 20 minutes. 30 not enough.

9/27 Picked a wild rose. Breathed in its fragrance. Studied it from all angles. First drew it without looking at the paper. Then sketched it in detail. Drawing clears my mind like shaking an Etch-A-Sketch.

10/9 Walking the dog, actively admired every flower I saw. Few now, precious. Smiled the whole while.

You get the idea....

On the Christian calendar, Lent begins this week. Forty days when the observant “give something up” – not so much to suffer, as to make room for something else, something worthy. Call it contemplation, insight, spirit. Call it buoyancy.

I haven’t given anything up for Lent in years but love the idea of setting the intention to make time every day for spiritual nourishment. So I am returning to that, committing to engaging in at least 20 minutes of spiritual practice every day for 40 days – less than a semester ☺ A practice of inviting sweetness and buoyancy.

How about you? Will you come too? We can experiment with this notion of buoyancy... floating...spaciousness. We can do it together as part of our journey. If you think you might like to dip a toe in, come to the fireside chat today at 11:30 and we’ll give it a go.

In closing, one more take on buoyancy: You know that *you* keep UUFES afloat. Not only by pledging what you can (thank you!) but with your hands and hearts, your time and your energy. Small groups and committees, do the lion’s share of what keeps UUFES afloat. We will acknowledge them with roses of recognition.

[Each group/committee rises, and individuals who wish share *one word* about the experience.]

*Governing Board* is responsible for all operations of the Fellowship

*Building & Grounds* keeps things running and clean and in good shape, plans for future needs

*Children & Youth Program* prioritizes our young people

*Committee on Ministry* focuses on feeding the health of UUFES

*Finance Committee* oversees all financial aspects of UUFES

*Hospitality* Manages coffee hour from start to finish

*Leadership Development* oversees the orderly transition of board and committee members

*Membership* plans fellowship events, works on ways to attract and welcome people

*Church openers/closers* Thank you!

*Pastoral Care* offers tender acts of mercy

*Pledge Drive Team* organizes the annual canvass

*Special Collections* coordinates monthly donations to a worthy cause

*Other Social Justice* activities include the Dinner Bell, community evenings, 68 Hrs of Hunger

*Sunday Services* considers all aspects of worship, coordinates lay-led and guest speaker services

*Worship Associates* co-lead services

*Music Ministry* keeps growing as singers and instrumentalists join in

*Book Group* lifts up thought-provoking literature, plans ways to deepen awareness

*Shawl Ministry* creates soft, warm prayer shawls

*Ways and Means* raises invaluable funds: UUUsed, the UUFES booth, Cookie Walk, Plant Sale

*Men’s Group* and *Women’s Group* bring people together in fellowship

Those of us watching and wondering are encouraged to wonder...where at UUFES might be an enlivening place for me? Together, we keep this boat afloat.