

## ***Spotting The Men***

Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver  
August 10, 2025

### ***Reflection on the Theme*** – Eric LaBrant

Walt Whitman has been an interesting occasional visitor on this trek of mine to understand life and my part in it. My first introduction was an anthology of poetry that included Oh Captain My Captain. Powerful and emotionally evocative, I thought in my 12 year old version. Around age 18, my mentor Charles, a huge fan of poetry, introduced me to Leaves of Grass. I came away with a much different impression of Walt, as someone with the same sorts of things on his mind as an 18-year-old fella like me, except... he sure thought about beautiful men more than I did.

But a decade or three later, I'm circling back and finding Walt to be not only a skilled and rich poet, but as someone who embraced a healthy, non-toxic notion of masculinity that does not require anyone to be lesser or greater. In fact he specifically rejects that in much of his writing.

While our culture is asking questions about not only the role of masculinity, but the very nature of it, as a dude I have to ask those same questions almost daily in my real life, about who I want to be and how I want to show up in the world, and with no option to set it aside as an academic or political question. It's come up as a full-time solo dad in a society where weekend dads and full-time single moms are far more common, raising a daughter to know that the patriarchy is real, but also that it's completely unnecessary BS, and a son to be strong and protective and kind and gentle. It comes up as a mostly hetero fella attempting to date and talking about simple things like who pays for dinner.

So I'm grateful for the poetry of Walt Whitman, such as this passage from I Sing the Body Electric, publishing a concept of masculinity that is connected and emotional, as robust as he can be but not invincible, three-dimensional and real, and far healthier than any stereo.

The male is not less the soul nor more, he too is in his place,

He too is all qualities, he is action and power,

The flush of the known universe is in him,

Scorn becomes him well, and appetite and defiance become him well,

The wildest largest passions, bliss that is utmost, sorrow that is utmost become him well, pride is for him,

The full-spread pride of man is calming and excellent to the soul,  
Knowledge becomes him, he likes it always, he brings every thing to the test of himself,  
Whatever the survey, whatever the sea and the sail he strikes soundings at last only here,  
(Where else does he strike soundings except here?)

The man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred,  
No matter who it is, it is sacred—is it the meanest one in the laborers' gang?  
Is it one of the dull-faced immigrants just landed on the wharf?  
Each belongs here or anywhere just as much as the well-off, just as much as you,  
Each has his or her place in the procession.

(All is a procession,  
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion.)