

Three Reflections on Embodying Resilience

Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver

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Reflection by Bradon Kanyid

Hi, I'm Bradon.

When I was a child, I think my life was pretty different from a lot of people's, but at the time I didn't necessarily know to what extent. I knew that my parents weren't like other parents, and that I didn't always live the way other kids seemed to. Other people's dads weren't getting arrested at their birthday parties, like mine did the day I turned 5. Other kids didn't bounce around from one family member to another, spend holidays in hotel rooms, or couch-surf when money was particularly tight. My childhood is marked by instances of domestic violence, all forms of abuse, and neglect.

And yet, I never felt like my childhood was something I was surviving. I somehow didn't take it personally that my parents were ill-equipped to manage their substance abuse disorders while raising me, or that their poor choices spilled out into my life. I would often imagine that I was actually an alien, and that as an experiment the other aliens had left me with these human parents. I took inventory of the things my parents did, and decided early on - at age 6 or 7 - that the best way to get along would be to do the complete opposite of what I saw them do. This adaptation I made ended up serving me really well in childhood, shaping me into a very independent kid, ready for any form of chaos to be thrown my direction, and with a sense that I had only myself to rely upon.

As a young adult, the effects of growing up in this way weren't readily apparent to me until my wife and I began to plan a life together. Being completely self-reliant was not only no longer necessary, it was antithetical to being one part of a working whole. It turns out that when you're doing stuff like living together, getting married, and having a child it's important that you learn to rely on your partner and vice versa. And so I learned a new way to be resilient, but now instead of learning to rise above adverse childhood experience through extreme self-reliance, I had to learn how to be a part of something bigger than myself - a family.

Now as the father to a 10-year-old, Mathilda, I often find myself concerned that I'm not seeing the same level of self-reliance in her that I remember having when I was her age. It takes me a bit to step back and remember that that form of resilience was a coping mechanism to survive instability. Mathilda has only lived in one house her whole life. She has friends she's kept since kindergarten and even before. We provide her with structure, and security. Why, then, do I expect her to behave the same as I did, when there's no muck for her to pull herself out of? I *hope* that it's coming from a sense of protection. I know my own resilience is the only thing that saved me, so I guess it's natural for me to want her to have the same safety net. A safety net she carries inside herself.

But that's not how real safety nets work. Safety nets are many ropes and fibers, connected together, working together to each bear a part of the load. And as I look around this sanctuary, I think that's what

I see. I see a community of people, looking to help each other and share the load. So now I'm learning a new way to be resilient, and I'm learning that along with my daughter, and that is how to be a member of a community. I am so glad that there is a life where this softer, kinder resilience is available to both of us, and you're all a part of that. Thank you.

Reflection by Rebecca Olson

Resilience is good for you, but never seems to feel good when you need to use it. It is the thing that gets you to move through difficulties until you find the other side of it, no matter how long that may take. Finding the other side always seems to prove worth it, though. On the other side of challenges we find achievement, satisfaction, alignment, joy, a sense of accomplishment, pride in overcoming, a sense that we have gained (or possibly have given) more than we had hoped, or maybe just as we had hoped - hope fulfilled.

Resilience is the thing that allows you to dare to dream, to believe in a brighter future, to indulge in the audacity of hope. It is the thing you need in order to turn imagined happiness into reality. Let me explain what I mean, just a little. From the time I was a small child, being raised in an evangelical/pentecostal group, I knew this was not happiness, nor was it the thing any sort of Creator could have had in mind for the Created. My heart began to dwell on what it meant to be happy and I searched intently for examples of those who had figured it out. This essential question - "Where are the happy people, and why are they happy?" - has been accompanied by a deep well of resilience in searching for the answer.

My search for better alignment between what I believed to be possible and what had been my reality led me out of evangelicalism at 18, but at 25 years old, desperately needing to reparent myself, craving a sense of safety and structure, a place to belong and the profound drive to feel a part of a healthy family, I found myself drawn to Mormonism, where I was welcomed, celebrated, and stayed for 16 years. You see, my imagined reality, the ultimate happiness in my mind, was to be a part of a healthy, loving, functional family - and the LDS organization promised that in spades. So I dove right in. Married right away, divorced three years later, married a second time into a well respected, large family which would surely result in the fulfillment of that long sought after hope of belonging to a healthy family.....I finally had to admit to myself I was wrong. This was not the way. I had hoped that so many lies would prove to be true, and after 16 years of it, I had to face it, I had to accept it, I had to dig into my resilience and leave again, because the search was still on and the journey required something much, much different. But this time, I had 3 amazing children and the most supportive life partner embarking on this stretch of the journey with me.

If we are watching for it, we will be able to see so many examples of resilience in our lives and in the lives of others. I'll never forget one of my most proud moments as a track coach. One of my relay runners dropped the baton at the starting line. Instead of getting lost in the disappointment of the moment, she retrieved the baton and completed her leg with a clean handoff to the second runner. The team finished the race with the first runner believing she had disqualified her team. But because she did not impede any other runners when retrieving the baton, the officials did not have to disqualify them

and they were allowed to keep the points they had earned with their finish. You never know what may be possible when we choose to just keep going.

Some personal examples of moments requiring resilience include leaving the religion of my childhood and finding the bridge of Mormonism in search of something more aligned with the hope of joy. Ending my first marriage after deciding that one bad decision shouldn't have the power to deny the hope of joy for the rest of my days, ... and then marrying a far better aligned partner, also took resilience. Deciding to go to grad school and earn a degree that would allow me to enter a field I'd dreamed about for years definitely took resilience. Daring to try to bring our 3rd child into this world after losing two pregnancies, because three children lived in my heart and I longed for them to live also in my home, required resilience. Exiting Mormonism with the realization that what I was looking for would not be found in something outside of me and that I had to create it myself, demanded resilience. Choosing to uproot my family in order to get them out of Utah, out of an environment where we were reminded every day of our "fallen, lost, outsider" status - because I believed it would be better for our mental health - took resilience.

Resilience has paid off in more ways than I can explain. It is good to be resilient. Good things happen when we exercise this muscle, but it almost never feels good in the thick of the moments in which it is required of us during the pursuit of a preferred future, a desired outcome, or a hope of something better. And you will know in your heart when the moment requires an adjustment to expectations rather than more resilience, because those moments do exist.

In closing, may our well of resilience run deep as we move through these current, challenging, and sometimes very dark times. Because the other side of it all will have been worth the effort, we must strive to get through to the other side, together. This will surely require our collective resilience.

Reflection by Laura Nissen

My own reflections regarding resilience are deeply personal...and how I came to be a member of this special church community.

Deep breath. For most of us, the world will fall apart at some point - or several. I wish this weren't so...but as I look around...it is simply the way things work. For me - such a period happened not long ago.

Though a long time UU in Portland, I hadn't yet connected with you all here in Vancouver til a few years ago, when all the things you hope will never happen to you...happened to me.

Almost three years ago, the bottom fell out of my life (and it continued to fall for an unwelcome season in a heartbreakingly complicated story). There were stars, there were ambulances, there were emergencies, there were treatments, there were tears and a severing of trust in a loving God, there were desperately unwanted endings. Then, quietly, there were deaths too - without mercy - of beloved

people in my life - who were miracles - whom I couldn't imagine life in any other shape. I left a career that I had loved but which I'd outgrown. I moved from a place I loved into a place I was uncertain. There were health challenges - and family/friends (much loved) but far away. I faced - for the first time - a life on my own (save the sweetest dog in the universe). I faced a disorienting amount of freedom and choice and latitude with no real idea what to do with it...still working that out actually.

During the worst of it - I reached out to call Rev. Kathryn. I simply felt drawn here - had planned to come sooner but it simply wasn't meant to be til then. I shared the contours of my situation - she said come. I said I'll be the person in the back of the room crying. She said we can handle it, come anyway, we have a place for you. When I came in the door the first time, and for many Sundays after, I felt simple, pure and clear....love. The love intended, poured, nurtured and shared. Among people who all brought their own complications right into this room along with themselves...you. You all brought love into this place every Sunday...and frankly...the glow of it it has helped me find my way. It has repaired me. The engine and sentinel and flame and song of love. I get the chance to tell you..all of this is in my heart.

Coming from a failed Catholic upbringing...I have complicated feelings about the idea of church. I both long for it and am suspicious of it. That said, I simply couldn't do anything but let myself open to what happens here. I was just too broken. Open to your wide open hearts, open to the music, open to the sense of purpose, open to the channel of love and mystery and joy that somehow persists despite all the reasons to be so sad. Open to each and every one of you.

Shock gave me a spine and my midwestern roots gave me determination, but life gave me a measure of despair and solitude that is transitioning slowly to peace. What I have learned about resilience is that sometimes it is not something you "do" - it is just something you lay down on the ground and receive unexpectedly as a gift after you give up because you simply can't fight any more. I didn't have to earn it, perform, or ask. I received it from some mysterious place that was in part, facilitated by what happens here.

Today I bring my peace to you. And my love. And my gratitude..out loud. Being invited to share today...gave me the chance to say, with all of my heart, something that we don't get to say enough to one another - thank you. Thank you for the gift of what you all do together and individually, so beautifully. Making space for love in a cruel and crushing and gorgeous and noisy world. Thank you for teaching me about things I couldn't learn about love and connection on my own, and generously giving me a place to hang on while I could catch my breath. Thank you for making a space for me. I'm here to join you and ready to contribute...and bring the imperfect offerings of myself. I love you.

Teach me what I cannot learn alone.

Let us share what we know, what we cannot fathom.

Speak to me of mysteries, and let us never lie to one another.

May our fierce and tender longing fuel the fire in our souls.

When we stand side by side, let us dare to focus our desire towards the truth.

May we be reminders, each for the other, that the path of transformation passes through the flames.

To take one step is courageous; to stay on the path day after day,

Choosing the unknown, and facing yet another fear, this is nothing short of grace.

— Danna Faulds