Interview with Janet Harvey
September 25, 2001
Interviewer, Bonnie Habel

Bonnie: I am interviewing Janet Harvey about her days with the Unitarian-Universalist Church in Asheville. How long were you in Asheville before you found the church?

Janet: Probably about six months.

Bonnie: So you moved in the 1970’s?

Janet: We moved in January, 1976. I was pregnant with Martha. We moved to Waynesville and went to the Episcopal Church there, but I really wanted to look at the Unitarian-Universalist Church because we had gone to one in Colorado Springs and to a small fellowship in Greenville, North Carolina, so we would come to the church periodically and met the core group of young families, the Holts, the Keevers, the Godbolds and the Brightwells. They were delighted to have – oh, good, one more family, but we had girls. Only one girl at that point and then another girl, and it was like, where are the boys?

Bonnie: Where were they, not with that group.

Janet: Yes, we had two boys. They were a little bit older maybe. By the time that Martha was born, which was in March, we were going regularly to the church.

Bonnie: Let’s back up just a little bit. When you moved here tell me about your educational background and what you were . . . were you looking to work somewhere or were you just happy to stay home with the two girls?

Janet: A little bit of both. My background was in art history and I had been involved in religious education in Colorado Springs, and even learned about the accreditation program for director of religious education, and was just fascinated with teaching because it was totally different from what I had grown up with in the Presbyterian Church. As far as working we were so far out – we weren’t that far out in Waynesville at that time, but with a young child and a baby on the way, my focus was on the children. But at the same time I was interested in doing things in a creative way, particularly art. I had been doing pen and ink and acrylic. I’m not sure exactly when, but then I started taking a course in calligraphy.
Bonnie: These are all things – even though I’ve known you for so long – I didn’t know a lot of these things about you, so this is fun for me too. After you had been there a short while, I’m sure somebody asked you to volunteer.

Janet: Almost immediately, as soon as I mentioned anything about religious education, it was like, oh, would you like to be chair of the committee. We were a small group, everybody had to work. I also wanted to mention that one of the first people, in addition to the Keevers, Godbolds, Holts and Brightwells, was meeting Mrs. Lindsey, who was taking care of the nursery at that time and was definitely the welcome point for a lot of young families. She cared for so many of our children.

Bonnie: That’s right, my David. It reminds me of the African tale that says that no one really dies as long as they are remembered. Mrs. Lindsey will never die because when I do these interviews she is mentioned. She has touched so many lives of the people at UUCA. It’s wonderful that you remember her like so many others do.

Bonnie: You mentioned Tom being Episcopalian. Were you a previous denomination other than UU?

Janet: Presbyterian. But I go all the way back to John Knox. Father did all the genealogy. We are descended from his brother. So with my strong Presbyterian background – everybody else in my family being Presbyterian – they sort of looked askance at me. They said, what are you doing. I said, I’m just following in John Knox’s tradition, just taking a step away.

Bonnie: Sort of a pilgrim in your family?

Janet: Yes. But I didn’t feel like I was rejecting anything so much as expanding on what I had grown up with.

Bonnie: Did they understand this and accept it?

Janet: No, my mother kept reading these books that said Unitarian-Universalists were a cult, so she’d have lots of questions.

Bonnie: She read the wrong books.

Janet: She read the wrong books.

Bonnie: Did you start giving her some others?
Janet: I did. And her best friend, one of her good friends, was Unitarian-Universalist. And what astounds me is that we had this quarry where we would go swimming, and Mrs. Mahlman, I knew her for years, and my mother even mentioned she was a Unitarian, went to the church in Wilmington, but it never connected. I didn’t even know we had a fellowship in my town, which had been there the entire time I was growing up.

Bonnie: You had been busy with your friends at the Presbyterian Church. I suppose that happens to our kids, I’m sure it does happen in Asheville, that they don’t know we exist. You just joined then in March, you didn’t wait around?

Janet: No, we joined relatively quickly.

Bonnie: Was that congregation about what size at that time? We had just gotten in the new church.

Janet: Right, but the section was still Bill Hammond’s study, so we didn’t have the full sanctuary at that point, so I’m thinking it may have been around 300, three or four hundred?

Bonnie: I don’t think it was quite that much. I remember being on a long range committee that we had 285.

Janet: OK.

Bonnie: But we soon started growing.

Janet: But what I also remember is that we always had the folding chairs in the sanctuary, particularly Easter and Christmas and any major event, because there were so many people, so many extra people.

Bonnie: And who was that minister?

Janet: Bill Hammond.

Bonnie: Tracy Pullman had just retired?

Janet: Yes.

Bonnie: Bill did come after Tracy, didn’t he?
Janet: Yes.

Bonnie: Was there a choir?

Janet: I don’t remember if there was a choir or not. What I do remember is that I felt like I had come back to a Presbyterian Church because the church in Colorado Springs was in a kind of rebellion against being too churchy. They had a minister but the minister was only allowed to preach once a month, and it was Orlock Miller, who had been with . . . I just lost it . . .

Bonnie: In Colorado Springs?

Janet: No, who was in Birmingham.

Bonnie: Oh, during the 60’s?

Janet: Yes, he was with Clark Olsen.

Bonnie: They knew one another then.

Janet: I was accustomed to a church where they really didn’t want to do hymns, and it was sort of unique, but it wasn’t really church for me, but a lot of innovative programs. So coming back to Asheville was coming back to a more, in some ways, conservative church experience, and more traditional church experience.

Bonnie: That makes me think – did you have religious education separate from the church hour. Was it earlier and then church was at 11:00?

Janet: Yes.

Bonnie: So there were two separate –

Janet: No, no, they were at the same time. They had always been at the same time.

Bonnie: Was that 11:00 most of the time?

Janet: Yes.

Bonnie: So church was at 11:00 and RE coincided. Then the people that worked in RE hardly ever got to come up to the church service.
Janet: Right. The other thing that I remember . . . we were working on a Christmas program and we were going to do the traditional Christmas story but -- this was when Lisa Holt was the director of religious education, and she said, but we’re going to leave out the angels. And I said, leave out the angels, why would we leave out the angels? They’re part of the story. And I also noticed you couldn’t find a bible in the church anywhere, except maybe in the minister’s study. That surprised me too, since I was still relatively new to Unitarian-Universalism.

(Pause)

Bonnie: We were talking about the things you missed there at the Unitarian Church when you first worked with the RE, and bibles were one of those things. Did you change that some when you got in as director of RE?

Janet: Yes, I made sure that there was not only one bible, but a number of versions of the bible, as well as an illustrated children’s bible, which I found kind of interesting. When I bought that Martha read it from cover to cover, so they were available for the teachers and for children to take out or to utilize for different lesson plans and worship.

Bonnie: We mentioned earlier that just a few weeks or months after you joined the church somebody asked you to be chairman of the RE committee, and Lisa Holt was the director at that time. How long was it until they asked you to be director?

Janet: Well, first I said I wouldn’t be the committee chair because I hadn’t a clue what was expected, so I ended up co-chairing. By this time Martha Gelder and Bob Gelder had joined the church with a boy, one boy, and they were so delighted to have one boy at least, so we co-chaired the committee. But then it wasn’t too long before Lisa said that she would prefer not to be the director and asked me if I wanted to be, and I thought, but I don’t know what you do. I sort of had an idea but not exactly, but I said yes.

Bonnie: Good. Those girls and that one boy needed you. And that was in about what year, do you think?

Janet: That was probably around ’78.

Bonnie: And Bill Hammond was still . . .

Janet: He was still there.
Bonnie: You had mentioned that when you were in Colorado Springs you were intrigued by the whole idea of maybe director of religious education as a curriculum, and as something for you to strive for as an official thing. Did you find something nearby Asheville to actually get you into that program?

Janet: No. The odd part, even though I majored in art history, I was fascinated with religion, and there was a religion major at Wilson College where I went, and a number of my friends became religion majors. But I had no thought of becoming a minister because I had never seen a woman minister, and so I didn’t even consider it. It wasn’t until I was nursing Martha, and I went to a Lamaze group and met a Methodist woman minister in Haywood County, who was a co-minister with her husband. She was the first, and then I got invited to be in these dialogue groups. I went to the Intentional Growth Center at Lake Junaluska, so there was sort of a growing interest in things theological.

Bonnie: That was near where you were living.

Janet: Right. And I hadn’t really met any women Unitarian-Universalist ministers until there were a number of women’s conferences and I had gone to one at the church in Knoxville. Mary Nelson and Alice Squire Wesley — Alice Squire Wesley had done a workshop on Tillie Olson, and I was fascinated with Tillie Olson, who is an author. Mary and Alice did the service, and it was the first time and it hit me that I had never ever been in a service where the women were the conductors of worship, and it was . . . I even remember the title of the sermon, Jesus Christ and the Advent of the Dishwasher.

Bonnie: This is the one in Knoxville?

Janet: Yes. Alice did the service. I don’t even remember what she said beyond that because I was writing a poem, Two Women, and just entranced with the idea that maybe this is a possibility. I met with Alice later that night and talked about it, and she told me that it’s something that . . . there are gains and losses in going into ministry, and that a person could be working in a shoe store and still minister to people. So there were many ways to minister and I should very carefully think this through. I had already been talking with Tracy Robinson Harris, who was also a religious educator, and going to a number of the little conferences that I was going to in the district. She had already started in the independent study program, so I talked with her. Her advisor was Mary Nelson, and then in about 1981 I applied for the independent study program.
Bonnie: I remember there was a committee formed to encourage and help you. Bill Hammond, of course, was one of the first ones to encourage you, but the committee was composed of other members of the church. Do you remember who those people were?

Janet: Becky Ketz and Dick DuMez.

Bonnie: And you would meet with them?

Janet: That was actually about midway in the process. By that time the independent study committee recognized there was a need to have support committees within the churches to assist, not only the person going through the independent study program, but also the congregation in understanding what it was.

Bonnie: Did you know it was going to be a two year, four year – did you know how many years you were committing?

Janet: I knew it would be over four years. The difficulty during the period that I was in the program was that it had moved from the accredited director of religious education to minister of religious education program. Initially it was an independent study program for directors and now it was an independent study for minister of religious education. A little historical note there, the first general assembly that I went to was in Philadelphia. It was the first general assembly where they honored the ministers of religious education, and I was thrilled to be there as these people were being recognized. They were the women who had written the curriculums and had been the time honored names in religious education, and I even was able to sneak into the liberal religious educators’ celebration honoring them afterwards. But what I learned was how sad this was that they had been doing this for ten and twenty years but had never been recognized until this point, and that there had been this huge discussion and debate and dialogue about is this a ministry. It had finally been recognized as a ministry and these women were finally being recognized, but it was both a celebration, but a painful one at the same time.

Bonnie: Was that because of the Unitarian-Universalist hierarchy. Was it a policy thing or just overlooking it, like men sometimes do?

Janet: I think it was the idea that men are ministers and women take care of the children. It was just something that women did. Although when St. Lawrence was still an educational institution their primary program was religious education with Agnes McQueen, and it was recognized, people got degrees in it, but when St. Lawrence became part of Meadville-Lombard that whole religious education thrust
was lost. So there were a lot of political things that happened where religious
education could have been a more primary part as it had been earlier in Sophia Fox
and Agnes McQueen’s day, and then it was lost. It was a tragic loss.

Bonnie: But it must be coming back around again.

Janet: Now that Meadville-Lombard is the center of religious education and Sophia
Fox Center is there, and the independent study program is now a modified residency
program that is located at Meadville-Lombard, then there has been this huge shift
back.

Bonnie: This is great information and no one else in our church has attempted this
program, and we haven’t let people know about it enough to excite someone like you
who would be at that point in their lives where this is something that they would say,
yes, I would like to do this.

Janet: This is the other piece. At that time you did not get a degree. It was equivalent
to a masters in divinity but there was no degree, so a lot of people dropped out after a
number of years because they weren’t going to get a degree. But while I was going
through it they were trying very hard to get the program accredited so that there
would be a degree. So would hang on and slow down, and they were going to get
the degree through the UUA through the state of Massachusetts, but then all of that
fell through. By that time I had held off, but it just wasn’t going to happen, so I had
to speed up and finish because by that time it had been ten years. There were a lot of
things that happened in the middle of those ten years, so . . .

Bonnie: Ordained in 1991, and you didn’t ever really get that masters of religious
education?

Janet: Now you can get it through Meadville-Lombard, because now that it is a
modified residency program they have gone through what was needed to be done to
be accredited, and while I was going through the program a lot of us said, could we
just have a catalog like you get at a regular college where you take this course, this
course and this course. Instead it was, you are to gain a working knowledge in these
eighteen different subject areas, and you create the syllabus, so we had to either find
courses or find somebody to work with us, and it really required tremendous self-
initiation and discipline to keep doing this. I took courses at Boston College, I took
courses through Western Carolina, I worked with folks in the church, in the
community. I would have to create the entire course and then work with a person,
and also determine how will this be evaluated, and work with that person for the
evaluation.
Bonnie: I see you going to all these different people and having to explain this whole thing to every single new person that you need to work with.

Janet: Right.

Bonnie: What a huge task.

Janet: Now that it’s at Meadville-Lombard they have a course of study, and you take this course, this course, this course, and there are some independent projects. Even one of the early independent study members said that there was huge loss in creativity but a gain in a standardizing of it in order to be accredited.

Bonnie: Well, you should have gotten the extra degree in creativity then, because that’s what you were doing during that whole time.

Janet: But here’s the good thing. When I applied for my job at the mediation center as a state mediator, you have to have a masters degree, and I went, oh dear. However, the person in charge in Raleigh was a Unitarian-Universalist who knew about the independent study program and said, no problem, she’s done it.

Bonnie: Isn’t that one of the lucky breaks in life. Let’s go back to during those ten years, ’81 to ’91 . . . I know how busy you were all night long doing your creative planning and the work that went along with it, but during the week did you keep regular office hours and organize your teachers and all of that during the week, and then see it come to fruition on Sunday.

Janet: When I started . . . Diana Bilbrey really, I don’t know much before Diana, but she sort of set up the structure of what being the director involved, and then Lisa followed Diana.

Bonnie: That’s interesting. I hadn’t even known of Diana being the director.

Janet: She had applied to the independent study program long, long ago. It was quarter time, and I was paid $100 a month, and at that point it was in Beacon House, and, if I remember, there were perhaps six different classes.

Bonnie: You combined grades?

Janet: There were maybe 80 children. That seems about right. Out of those children sometimes 60 would come or something, but it was beginning to be just a noticeable
bunch of kids, with still babies, but still that good high school group. There were about seven in the high school group when David was in it, and then your kids coming along. And what would be amazing that sort of as families came in and left and children grew up, the actual demographics would change to where we would have maybe a few toddlers and a lot of elementary school and a good high school group. Then two or three years later there would be, like fewer six graders, so it was always a question of how to put together age groups, which age groups should be together, which ones shouldn’t be together, and then choosing a curriculum for them. A lot of it was learning what are the curriculum, learning more and more about the whole Unitarian-Universalist plan of religious education which was continually changing, because there was a huge emphasis on humanism, and then we were moving into this desire for more spirituality. I definitely was in that camp. When I started we didn’t do worship with the children. They came to intergenerational services, but there was no specific worship for children, so that was something that I initiated, and involved Linda Metzner and Nels Arnold over time, who added the music and the storytelling. Eventually we had two worship services with the children, one for the older group in Jefferson House and one for the younger group over in the main building. There was a huge growth that way. A tremendous amount of change in curriculum over the time that I was there, that moved away . . . we had Man, the Meaning Maker, and a lot of sort of humanist, scientific kinds of curriculum, world religions. Then it started to move more into, who are we as Unitarian Universalists, so there was this identity crisis that occurred in the denomination.

Bonnie: So you lived more intensely through those kinds of things, not only because of your study but because of the curriculum changes.

Janet: Right.

Bonnie: And I was just a happy Unitarian trying to find my own way, but in a different direction. That’s fun to hear that it was actually happening in the whole movement.

Janet: One of the things was that if you grow up in a Christian church it is very clear who you are, what the identity is, what the book is, what you’re taught to believe, and in the Unitarian-Universalist churches there was a smorgasbord of possibilities, so as a director it’s -- what’s the particular flavor identity of this church, what are the particular needs, and really trying to think through, what do children need in this world as it is today to move through it with the ideals and values that we hold dear.

Bonnie: How appropriate.
Janet: And that’s when we started really – we didn’t use the chalice, that came in during the time that I was there, as a symbol because we didn’t have a symbol, as such. We were lighting the chalice. The other one was the emphasis on the purposes and principles, which even now has moved beyond to the sources, which I think is incredibly important because it tells people what we draw from and why we have chosen these particular principles.

Bonnie: How much help did Beacon Street, the national, give you in your curriculum resources?

Janet: They would send a packet out quarterly, called the Reach Packet, and that would have information about new curriculum, there might be questionnaires where they would be gathering information from different churches or fellowships, flyers about curriculum, sometimes samples of parts of curriculum, so that was very helpful. There was usually a seasonal packet so there was a variety of resources for Easter services and Christmas services. The other part that I did was build the library, so that there were more resources in the different areas to draw on.

Bonnie: And the parents of the children were encouraged in what way to participate? Was there a requirement that they spend so much time teaching or greeting or whatever the jobs that you felt were necessary?

Janet: There was a request, it wasn’t a requirement, that we needed folks to help us out. At the same time, recognizing that the parents often needed to be renewed spiritually and to sit in church and to be renewed, and to have somebody else then be with their children; particularly if they were new to Unitarian-Universalism, in some ways it didn’t seem fair, like now teach it when they didn’t even know who they were as Unitarian-Universalists. That’s when we would call on some of the older longer-time members of the church to assist in teaching. That’s where Gus Young was valuable.

Bonnie: Yes, and you were too.

Janet: Well, I was there for a short time. But when I was teaching every day, and the intensity of five days a week, I didn’t give as much time on Sunday as I now I can see that I should have when the children were little. But they gained so much from these other adults. David started, I think, with the very first “Your Own Sexuality” class, and I believe Diana and George taught that . . .

Bonnie: I think so.
Janet: I think they were one of the early ones who were involved in that, and I’m glad to see that it is continuing. It changes its name now and then . . .

Bonnie: Our Whole Lives now.

Janet: Ok, Our Whole Lives. But the basic program is still intact, and I’m so glad. And we were innovators in that program because no other church had that, but a lot of churches utilized that sexuality curriculum, and Planned Parenthood did too. The other part about teachers was that it was difficult to have adults commit to the entire year, which made it hard for children to connect with a particular teacher. If we had one that would whole year then they had someone they could count on seeing, who had that continuity with them, got to know the children. It was important to have that, but it was getting harder and harder to have people do that, so we created teams of teachers so that they could share the curriculum, get to know the curriculum, get to know the children, but have time that they could also go to church. The other was having children where there was sort of a UU – you can go to church or you don’t have to. For adults they’re able to walk into church, sit down, and they’re not really interacting with the minister. They get to sit and take in and then they can leave, and they don’t really have to interact with anybody if they don’t want to. But in a Sunday school situation you’ve got children like in a school situation where each time they come they’re trying to figure out how they belong, do they belong, and they’re interacting with a teacher, they’re interacting with other children, so it seemed a real disservice to them to have them come once or twice a month where in order to feel part of a group it was important to come regularly. That was a struggle as well.

Bonnie: I remember when I was team teaching with the 5th grade, which was kind of a 4th or 6th sometimes, there were two little girls who just walked in, and their parents had never come, but they lived down the street and the two of them said, we would like to go that Sunday school, and they came. They came for months. They didn’t really stay for the whole year, but I was just intrigued by those two little children. All we got to know about them was that Sunday morning experience, but they seemed to like and feel comfortable . . . they were very assertive and creative young ladies, and I’m sure they went far on their own somewhere. Sometimes I think you need to be that open door church too because, for whatever reasons, there are people who need to explore. Let me think about some of the other things we need to cover. Did you ever give a This I Believe?

Janet: No, I didn’t. Other than probably through the building your own theology course. We had to do a statement in that.
Bonnie:  Was that an adult activity?

Janet:   It was an adult curriculum.

Bonnie:   And you were a participant or leader?

Janet:   Participant at that time. I know that I did it with Bill Hammond and I may have co-led it with Jim Brewer.

Bonnie: Bill Hammond was there most of this ten years that you were working in the independent study program?

Janet:   Well, actually I was there long enough to go through Bill Hammond, Jim Brewer, Bill Howe and Maureen. So I started with Bill, but Maureen was there when I was ordained. She had just begun.

Bonnie:   So there were four ministers during that period of time.

Janet:   Another thing I recognize that has changed is the playground. I was thinking when we had Beacon House, where did they play. I don’t think we really had anything.

Bonnie:   No, we had some grass.

Janet:   And then we had Norburn House and the backyard there. But then we tore that down and built the playground, and had Jefferson House. There was a huge increase in land and play area.

Bonnie:  And you were overseeing all of that in those years, the building, the tearing down and the new building. During that last couple of years, were you seeing that the growth was just pushing out all the walls at that time, or was Jefferson House serving the needs.

Janet:   Even then we were still using the conference room in the church, as well as all the rooms downstairs and all of Jefferson House.

Bonnie:  So the curriculum was working and the kids were liking it and they were staying and bringing more people with them. You have already covered this one pretty well as far as any major changes in your beliefs over all these years, but I don’t know if you want to make any other statements as far as your growth. Were you
Janet: The biggest growth from the time I started there with Lisa Holt saying, will you do a reading, and being terrified with my knees knocking to stand in front of that congregation, to being comfortable standing there and doing an entire service myself.

Bonnie: So that was a lot of growth. Did that come from the practice in front of your other cohorts who were doing this independent study?

Janet: It was mostly Bill Hammond saying, you’re going to help me with this service, you’re going to help me with this service, and together sort of co-creating the majority of the intergenerational services at this point. I thought that was just so affirming to have him consider me as having a lot of ability and things to add to a service and to work together to create it, and same with Jim Brewer, same with Bill Howe, that it was a huge co-creative effort.

Bonnie: Great. Co-creative – I like that.

Janet: They were very, very helpful. Having somebody else with me helped a lot, and it was just continuing to do it over and over again. The next thing, there was a minister who stepped away from the pulpit – I don’t remember her name, but everyone was like, oh . . . even the long time ministers were like, I can’t do that. Don’t take my papers away from me, don’t take that pulpit away from me, but she could stand to the side and just speak, like Rebecca Parker does. That has been a huge thing too, to be able to move away from the written word, and also recognizing that people don’t hear every word. So I also moved from writing out every word, to writing out more an outline of thoughts that I may have to look at to ready parts of it, but otherwise would sort of, not exactly adlib, but speak. That was very freeing.

Bonnie: I am just kind of in that process now. Of course, when I was teaching it was very easy, it was very natural, because I knew that I had to get from this point, to this point, to this point, and how I did it just sort of came out. But now that I have to give talks about – I am going to give one at UNCA. I wrote out every word I was going to say, and then I thought, this will bore them to death. You can’t read to people. So I really identify. I’m glad you mentioned that, how freeing it is when you can actually do that and make your outline as a security blanket but know what things you have to cover. You’ve seen the church grow and change. You mentioned those early people who were close friends of yours, their families were the same age and that kind of thing. There were also quite a few older members, so the younger members kind of stood out as unique and different because the founders, the
people that were organizing and staying with this church, were a lot of the older people. For awhile when those younger people would come to visit they would say, there are a lot of gray hairs. Can you remember in watching those years, how the congregation has changed? What did you see?

Janet: I basically saw more people coming in. I think the religious education program assisted in that. I noticed that with changes in ministers, some people would leave, some people would come back. I learned about that shift too. I also recognize that I as started attending more memorial services that there was so much that I didn’t know about these people who had been there for as long as I had been, years before, who were the elders of the church. They had had these incredible lives that I only heard about during the memorial services. I wished that I had known to ask them, what was it like back in the 20’s. When you were working in this area, what had happened then and what did you face. I still think that there is a lot that we lose that we’re not really talking about. It’s part of the, This I Believe, but we don’t do a whole lot of This I Believe, and actually dialoguing with one another.

Bonnie: We don’t do it often in the church service, but we do, I think it’s six times a year or something like that. But I know what you’re saying, to sit down with a cup of coffee and find out more about the intergenerational thing and, of course, now I’m at the upper end of the intergenerational, but when I first started in this church I was one of the younger ones and I was intrigued by the stories of the older people who worked hard to get this church started.

Janet: I created this curriculum, it was a native American curriculum, I had third graders at that point, and as part of that there was this respect for elders, so we had Jo Birdsahl come and speak to them. We said, this is one of our elders. She told them stories, and Gus came one time and talked to them.

Bonnie: I think I remember that you encouraged people to give that one time a month, to make it a part of their schedule, that the older members of the church, older in age or older in time they’d been in the church, to come down so the children were aware of you as a congregation member.

Janet: I do recognize as an older person, you get to understand a little bit more how some of the . . . just the energy of young children can be a lot when you’re expecting to have a quiet church experience, but at the same time that exuberant energy is just part of the whole church experience.

Bonnie: Oh, they come up glowing. I hate to say, come up, but in our church the RE is downstairs and they had to come up. They come up glowing because it was a good
experience. Are there any changes or similarities that have occurred to you? Are there other things that you’ve thought of in relation to the history of our church that we haven’t gotten to touch on?

Janet: One of the things that has traditionally been a problem and in my research, haven’t seen any different way of doing this in a Unitarian-Universalist church . . . when I was growing up in the Presbyterian church we had the early service, we had Sunday School, we had the late service, and as a child I was expected after sixth grade to be in church. There was a certain point that you were excused, if you were in the nursery or the toddler group, and then you were expected to sit in church for a certain period and then excused, and then, I think by sixth grade, to sit through the whole service. As I thought about the church as a worshipping community, why aren’t the children there. There was this huge divide between children and adults, but we structured it that way. On one hand it was developmentally so, that it is hard for a child to sit through a long sermon, even if it’s only fifteen minutes long, and at the same time we were teaching children to interact, to dialogue, to think and share what they were thinking, and then interact with adults and other kids around particular themes. Then once they become young adults that they’re supposed to sit still and listen in a church. Here are these two very, very different modes. Of course the junior high and senior high didn’t want to sit in church. They didn’t want to sit still and listen to somebody else. They wanted to interact, and they loved that interaction. When I go to youth conferences, they created worship based on their interaction, and they pulled up stories and they had poems and they had songs, and they knew how to create worship. They knew how to argue with one another, they knew consensus. I learned more from the youth and going to youth conferences and interacting with them than probably the majority of study in other areas.

Bonnie: I’m glad you added that because that was something important to you that we might not have touched on. I’m glad you added that.

Janet: I still don’t know why we do it. I don’t know why we don’t hold that whole educational function as important for both adults and youth. Why other churches . . . we have the same roots . . . but to say this is worship and this is when we work together to study, or meet together to study.

Bonnie: So adults are doing that also?

Janet: Yes. RE would be life-span and would have a priority within the Sunday morning.
Bonnie: Would we need to expand the actual building to accommodate something like that? Adults would want their rooms to do their interacting.

Janet: That’s part of it. There is still, what will we do with the children during the church service. Well, they could be in the church service and then you only need nursery, toddler teachers. It can’t be that hard if every other denomination is doing it.

Bonnie: We don’t like to be like every other denomination. Thank you Janet, this has been a wonderful time together.