

Ruth C. Shatto (RS) Arthur, would you tell me a little bit about your early experience with the church and with Unitarianism. I understand you were one of the very early ones way back when.

Arthur N. Poultney (AP) Yes, Ruth we came to the church in about 1953. I was still in grade school and Dr. Westwood was a sort of a summer minister for us. He liked to call himself our honorary minister. And that's when we would have a really large turnout relatively speaking. Dr. Westwood was an Englishman, a UU minister. He was retired. That's when our large turnout was.

RS: By large turnout what do you mean?

AP: Well what happened was this. We would have maybe 50 – 60 people during the summer when Dr. Westwood was there because Dr. Westwood was quite famous as a minister. However, when he returned to Clearwater, Florida, we had sort of the faithful. We had the Boyces, the Cornells, the Favels, my parents and us children and let's see and then some of the older people I don't remember them so much. My parents, the Reeves, Cornells – they were the young couples of the church like the Unicorns are today. We also had Sunday school along with the service and it was as we have it now. It would be at the same time as the church. Mariel Cornell was our Sunday School teacher primarily. We would have just one class because there were so few. We would have a little bit of a worship service, we would light some candles, we'd have certain stories, and we have a little field organ. It was about maybe three four octaves at most. It was a portable. Someone would play it, usually Pat Faybrook who was Art Faybrook's wife. She would work in Sunday School occasionally. Mrs. Cornell would go to church. We tried to alternate some so everyone would have a chance to participate in the services. This was at the YMCA. Ruth, it was a portable Sunday School. We had all our belongings, our tables, our chairs, our candles and the portable organ and we had to put them away at the end of the service and then next Sunday we'd have to get them all out again and set up for Sunday School. We did that for about four years in the YMCA and while we were still in the YMCA, we recruited Dan Welch like a lot of the other UU Fellowships in the south they were seeking retired ministers who were seeking much lighter load than they had their northern congregations. Of course we couldn't pay what the congregations in the north could either because we were such a small group. Well we were very fortunate in that Dan Welch who was then living in Knoxville Tennessee. We got word of him somehow. So we had a little search committee. Russel Wooden, Art Faybrook, my father all drove out to Knoxville to hear him preach at the Unitarian House in Knoxville. Back then they just had a little house. I saw it once in the early fifties. So we invited Dan to speak. Everyone was enthusiastic. We would have our own minister. Because prior to this when Dr. Westwood was not in the pulpit, we would have people read some sermons that other UU ministers had written or we just have lay lead services and a lot of these services someone would talk about their professions or one of their hobbies and of course we would have our coffee afterwards. That's been an institution every since I can remember. Even in the YMCA we'd have our coffee hours. Well after about four years of this the Y would only let groups visit for four years at most and we were sort of expanding a little bit and then we found a house on Vermont Avenue. This was an apartment house It had four apartments.

RS: Do you remember the picture?

AP: Yes, I remember the picture very well. It brings back a lot of fond memories because we were very enthusiastic about this because it was something that was our own. You have to have been at the Y when we had to set up and put away to appreciate what it would be like having your own church where we could leave things set up and make changes as we saw fit or we had need for. We had to do a few things to it of course. We had to add a couple of extra fire escapes upstairs because the downstairs two rooms consisted of the worship center, the choir would be in sort of an alcove that extended out beyond the church

RS: Do you mean you had a choir?

AP: We had a choir back then. Not a very big one, but, we still had one. Occasionally we would have the Allen High School girls. This was a colored school. I don't know if it is still there anymore. They were very good singers. We would invite them to sing now and then and they were excellent. So we had music. We had an organ, too. But it was an old pump organ and Russell Wooden, who was our organist at the time, could do a fantastic job on it. We had good music and the hymns I remember then well we had a lot of unsingable tunes with high philosophy. But that was the perception of a youth. Today we have more simple truths and singable tunes. I noticed that much more recently in our UU movement. Trying not to be too sophisticated and being broad minded and at the same time singing of simple truths. Getting back to the early years, another thing that was important to us was the church conferences, especially Blue Ridge which is out in Black Mountain. This is like our SUUSI today. Back then when we were smaller it was even more significant than now because of our small numbers and the Bible Belt was much more the Bible Belt in the fifties and sixties than it is today. At least I'm more buffered from it. There are still plenty of fundamentalist around.

RS: Was this a conference, district, regional, national?

AP: No, it's not national. It was the SE, the Thomas Jefferson Conference to make it correct which included Florida at the time. So they'd have the youth as well as the adults. I went to one youth conference one year and if I had a chance to spend a day or an evening, why we'd drive out to Blue Ridge for whatever the programs were.

RS: Why did you stop at the Blue Ridge and go up to Virginia? Do you know?

AP: That is because we were expanding so much. Blue Ridge Assembly could not accommodate us anymore to my knowledge. They had to move it to Radford, VA at Radford College.

RS: So it wasn't because it was a Unitarian or too liberal?

AP: I doubt it. But I have no proof one way or the other of that Ruth. There are a lot of inside things that I don't know. Everything. This is from a youth standpoint as I saw it at the time.

RS: Ok, let's back up a little bit. Did you always live here in Asheville? What age were you when you moved here?

AP: Ok, Dad was with the weather service which is the National Climatic Center now. So I was born in Leicher, MA. But Daddy got called to Caribou, Maine. Lived Caribou Maine for six years, then they transferred him to Albany, NY and then Chattanooga, Tennessee. We'd hardly if ever go to the church

then. Our parents were married in the Methodist Church, but when they were courting, they used to go to the Open Forum at the Unitarian church. And then we came to Asheville I believe about 1952. I was about 11 years old at the time. Once they learned about the Unitarian Church, they wanted something for us three children and some kind of religious education. We liked the church, both my sisters and myself. So then my parents signed the book. Next year they asked Daddy to be president. He was president one year. That's when we were working on finding our minister.

RS: Reverend Welch.

AP: Yes, Dan Welch. Dan was a very good speaker. They lived out in West Asheville and they'd come out to the house quite often because Daddy and Dan got along very well together and Mrs. Welch would always want to talk to my mother about the church. So my mother and Mrs. Welch would sit in the car and mother and Mrs. Welch would talk about the church and daddy and Mr. Welch would sit on the porch. US three kids would often be there on the porch. They'd talk baseball and gardening and Dan would ask us about our schooling and all. He'd light up his pipe. He was quite a pipe smoker when he wasn't in the pulpit. I remember one of his benedictions he had often for the services. I remember, And I think of

May the hope that never dies

And the love that cast out fear

Be with you 'Til the day Spring breaks and the shadows flee away.

My the hope that never dies

I don't know if that was Dan's quote or not but he used it as a benediction and if I hear anything similar to that it always makes me think of Dan Welch.

RS: That's beautiful. That's beautiful. I don't think I've ever heard that from the Unitarians. It's beautiful.

So you've always been in the Unitarian Church. In the Sunday School first, and then the church. You didn't

AP: Well sometime, I go to a church service because there may be only one person in the Sunday School and instead of having someone tied down teaching Sunday School, we'd all go up to the service. I'd get something out of them not a whole lot. But the Sunday School was small and we'd have the *Martin and Judy Books* and we had *Long Ago in Many Lands*. Then sometimes why once I remember there was just myself and Art Faybrook was the teacher and I was interested in radio at the time. I had built my first crystal set and he was quite knowledgeable in electronics. So Sunday School lesson that day consisted primarily of a question and answer session where I'd ask Art some questions about electricity and radio. I learned a lot there and eventually ended up with as an electronics engineer. So here I am now.

RS: That's great. But along with that you were getting some scientific views of Unitarianism other than the typical Christian creation. Is that right?

AP: Oh yes, One of the books we studied in fact, *Long Ago in Many Lands*. It was several myths of how the earth was created. I don't remember all the details of course. The very last chapter was a scientific approach as scientists understand the evolution of the universe as we understand it more or less today.

RS: Was there ever a youth LRY?

AP: Yes, there was LRY. I glad you mentioned that because that was sort of what kept the young people together. We had Gail Cornell, my sister, myself and then there was a Margaret Pillow and then we had Abby and Doug Pundett who came from Hendersonville. They'd drive from Hendersonville and we'd get together a lot for supper meetings on Saturday night and we would have an adult to give us a program. So we all sort of shared. We'd bring something like beans and franks, some Pepsis or coke and maybe some coleslaw or something for a supper. Then we'd have a program afterwards. We did quite a lot of that and then we'd plan on going to the conferences and all they used to have on Easter weekend and Thanksgiving weekend some city in the Southeast would host an LRY Conference. I remember going to those in Nashville and Charlotte and Oak Ridge. So we had a chance to travel and meet other LRYers. It was great for me to meet other LRYers. Some became very good friends even.

RS: Outside of the Hendersonville couple were there any other fellowships? How close were they? Hickory? Charlotte?

AP: Charlotte was by then a church. I think there was a Clemson group. But there were none anywhere near and we had a lot of people coming from Brevard and Hendersonville. Especially when Dan Welch came. Why some would drive 25 - 30 miles for some good Dan Welch preaching.

RS: And so when did Dan Welch leave?

AP: Dan left in about 63 I believe. And that's when we called Dick Gross. Dick Gross was with us for about 4 years. By then I had gone away to State and by then NC State. So church fell a little bit to the wayside at the time. I did hear Dick Gross a few times. My sister was married in our church and Dick Gross performed the ceremony and that was probably the biggest wedding the small church on Vermont Avenue did have.

And then later Dick Gross left of course for work with the North Carolina Heart Association. That's when we of course called Tracey Pullman. So, I don't know if I'm getting ahead from where you want to go from the early days or not?

RS: I want to hear about Tracey.

AP: Alright. Tracey, he always had a good service and all. I didn't go to as many of them as I do now of course because in my twenties I was not all that enthusiastic about the church really. But I still would I keep in touch. We expanded more which brought us to the church on Charlotte Street. About that time we had a lot more of my own age group at the church. Because I was sort of one of the kids back in the sixties you know. Everybody was probably

twice my age except for maybe a handful. But then once we moved onto Charlotte Street we practically doubled over night it seemed.

RS: Tell me a little more about that – from changing from Vermont to Charlotte. Was it on account of the attendance, was it more money or?

AP: It was some of both. I can't say it's any one thing. Reuben Robertson, who was a UU who brought Champion Papers to Canton was a Unitarian and of very much of means. So he sort of gave us the property and matched a lot of the funds for us to build and that sort of sowed some seeds for enthusiasm. Because we were growing we believed in ourselves. Tracey believed in us, too. Tracey Pullman. So we dug into our pockets and we built the church.

RS: What was the date, do you know?

AP: We started planning for it in the late sixties. We had our own architect of course, Bill Moore. We had a meeting. He made a model of the church and that generated a lot of enthusiasm too because it was more than just a picture. So the sort of early plans began in 1969 and 70. Ground breaking was in 71. And then we didn't move over there until I think it was early May of 72. The sanctuary was not complete yet. So we just set up chairs in the social hall which we now call Sandburg Hall. And Sandburg Hall then was about one third of the size it is now. It expanded when we did our bigger expansion in the early 80s. Sandburg Hall was enlarged significantly. We managed to squeeze everyone in there and it was a nice atmosphere. We had the sliding glass doors and all. We'd open them up and it like being in the open. By the fall of 72, the sanctuary was finished and the carpeting put in and all the pews and then we had our services in there. And then we started growing by leaps and bounds. The minister's study was still in one of the sections of the sanctuary. We moved it to its present location once the new addition was built and we needed that extra room and we still need extra room which we're all excited about at this time.

RS: Dr. Pullman, is that Nioma Pullman's father?

AP: Yes, it is.

RS: Ok that brings us up to date fairly well with the church for our history project. But I would like to hear more why you came back to it from college because you certainly were exposed to other people at that time your age who would be going to other churches and so what does Unitarianism mean to you and how come you stayed with it?

AP: Because I want a faith that's relevant to this life, Ruth. I believe in the here and now and I very much doubt in the hereafter. And the other churches are more interested in the hereafter than the here and now. And then some of the other beliefs, especially salvation I have trouble buying that. It's just a human sacrifice. Who would believe in such a egomaniac who would do such a thing, I want to put it bluntly. And whatever powers there are in the universe I don't

believe it wants someone to have to pay that dearly for someone's transgressions. It just doesn't make sense.

RS: But when did you come to that decision? Was it before you went to college, was during college or?

AP: I probably always sort of felt that way because I never worried about being saved when I was a kid. It's here and now. I knew academically some day I was going to die, but I just didn't worry about it because I didn't realize I was going to die I just knew it academically. I had a friend in Tenn. who always wanted me to go to training with him. His training union was a Baptist group that got together on Sunday night. Well, I wanted to listen to Jack Benny. I wanted something to laugh at, I didn't want to learn about religion. I wanted to laugh at something. So if that says anything about my faith. That's it.

RS: It probably helped that your parents were both involved in the church.

AP: It certainly did. It probably had more bearing than I realized. Because due to their perceptions of religion. They didn't worry about being saved and all. So why should I worry about being saved and all? My mother's parents, even I don't believe they believed in the salvation. They'd go to church. They were quite liberal in thought anyway even though they weren't Unitarians. So it probably rubbed off on me. But then what probably what brought me back as much as anything was people my own age. Because it was nice to be in with a group of peers. So when I got back...

RS: About what year was that?

AP: Oh, probably when we went over to Charlotte Street. So I was asked to serve on the newsletter. So I served on the newsletter with Lisa Andrews as the editor. I did that for two years. And then in the seventies I was asked to serve as clerk. So I served as clerk for two years when Walt Easenburg was president. Then early eighties I was asked to serve as usher chair. So I served as usher chair for a couple of years and I set up a roster and I would remind people this isn't a contract this is just a reminder that you're going to be head usher this month and to arrange for ushering this month and if they had a problem to see me. So I would arrange for head ushers and all. And that worked quite well. Did that for two years and then I was asked to serve on the housekeeping committee. This was purchasing kitchen supplies largely and seeing that the kitchen was ok. So did that for a couple of years. Then in 1990 I was asked to serve on the Board of Trustees. So I could not say no to that so I'm still on the Board of Trustees, but I will be going off in June. I feel that going to church is more than just attending and paying a pledge. So I've always done something like that for the church. Also doing some little thing like that gives me a feeling of belonging. In this church I very much have a feeling of belonging. More so as I get older really. In the seventies I felt sort of in it. More and more I have that feeling of belonging.

RS: And that 's very important and participation certainly gives that. You've been here in Asheville area except for the years you were off to college for approximately 40 years.

AP: Just about forty years. That's right.

RS: And just about every position at church perhaps not Treasurer or lay speaker but just about everything else.

AP: Oh I gave a youth sermon. I think I was a senior in high school at the time. It was sort of an essay on youth and we sang some of the relevant hymns. And the hymnal has helped build my faith, too, because there is an awful lot in our hymnal that let's say as Bill Hammond used to say is worthy of scripture or uncannonized. scripture. Like my favorite.

Wonders still the world shall witness

The morning hangs a signal that sounds along the ages.

Those to mention a few. Some we don't sing now. I don't know whether because we haven't degenderized them like Kenneth Patton's The Middle State. that's one I think is of significance somehow. I am hoping the new hymnal will degenderize it.

RS: I don't know that one. Do you know some of it?

yes,

Before the stars, a man is small

Before the atom great

Between the two infinities

He walks his middle state.

What is this creature, worm or god?

All meaning or inane ,

The hero of his wishful hope ,

Or miser of his pain?

So because of man and he in there I suspect that we don't sing it because it has not been degenderized or it hasn't been relevant.

So the hymnals have also helped shape my faith. Some of the responsive readings

RS: What was the name of that again?

AP: The Middle State. Kenneth Patton. I don't know who wrote the tune. It's a fairly old tune anyway. Not outright difficult but not a simple tune either.

RS: Arthur, I can't help but remarking that you have a beautiful bass voice and wondering why you haven't been inspired to sing in the choir?

AP: I tried it one time, but one of the choir directors and I.. I just wasn't choir material to this choir director. So, I will just be in the congregation and sing.

RS: We do need good voices in the congregation ,too. But I always enjoy sitting beside you because you have such a beautiful voice.

AP: Thank you.

RS: Speaking voice too. Did you ever teach Sunday School?

AP: Just substituting a few times and the only thing I remember now, I had the high school group and I didn't know what the curriculum was so I brought a book of man and superman and we read some of Don Juan in Hell which I think is a delight to the religious liberal.

RS: How about the Unicorns? Were you involved with that and when did that start?

AP: The Unicorns started I think about 20 years ago.. It may have been sooner. It sort of started when a handful of couples got together at someone's home. We just called it the Young Adults for a while. We'd have wine and cheese parties. I didn't like wine very much so one of the meetings I just brought beer. Well, after about a year's time just about everybody else brought beer too. Which I was kind of tickled over. I've not't served in the Unicorn office in any capacity but I go to a lot of the meetings and hosted a few here even.

RS: Yes, I think I was to one here.

AP: Yes

RS: Any other memories, conferences or people or characters or problems of the early days.?

AP: I have to scratch my memory a little bit on that. One memory that comes up. We had some universalist property. This was in Haywood County, just outside Canton. And we went to explore that one day. Norman Halburk, Gail Cornell, Roslyln, my sister and myself. We went out there to explore it. We couldn't get in there because the door was locked. One of the windows was a little bit loose, so Norm Holblurk boosted me up on his shoulders and I climbed in the window and opened it up so we could go in take a look at it. I don't know if we were planning to use it or not. We just wanted to take a look at it because well we were looking for some property or something.

RS: So we didn't actually own it?

AP: No, the universalists owned it. And there were a group of universalists in Haywood County at one time. Janet talked to us about it and she can probably tell you quite a bit about it. I just know that we went out there to look at some property and that's just one of the little instances that came to mind during



our conversation. So my memory needs a little bit of jogging but I can probably find a lot of interesting antidotes.

RS: Are you aware of when the Unitaritans and the Universalists joined here?

AP: I think it was 62, but I'm not sure. We used to call ourselves the Unitarian Church for the longest time. When we started calling ourselves the Unitarian Universalist Church.? I know we did by the time we got over on Charlotte Street. But when we started doing that with the signs and all that, its hard to say, Ruth.

RS: It probably came shortly after the headquarters joined.

AP: I would imagine.

RS: You would have been younger.

AP: Yeah, I would imagine so. But the sixties I was not nearly as active as today in church activities.

RS: Can you think of anything else before we close off?

AP: Not really. That just about does it Ruth. I have some memories. To talk for a whole hour on it. That's a bit difficult.

RS: Well, that's alright. We appreciate it. Thank you so much.

AP: That's the highlights. If you have questions and you want to follow up. Maybe I can give you some answers in the future.

RS: Thank you, Arthur.

AP: You're welcome.