

## CREDO

All my life, writing has come easily to me, and so, when asked to speak at this service, I didn't hesitate. But as I started to think about what I would talk about, I realized that while I have a credo (I think most people have one of some sort) I have never really tried to put it into words; it was going to require quite a lot of thought, and I couldn't fall back, as I usually do, on research.

I've been described as being a strong person. Some, especially my family, call it stubborn-my father's favorite word for me was obstreperous. I think of myself as resilient-a survivor. It may have not been an accident that my first role model at about age 13 was Scarlett O'Hara; she got a lot wrong, but she, too, was a survivor and I admired her for that; she never gave up, no matter how bad things got. When it comes to survival, both physical and emotional, I've learned that you can always take one more step, no matter how difficult it may be, than you think you can-always. Perhaps it can be defined in terms of sheer tenacity-all I know how to do is keep putting one foot in front of the other. If today doesn't go well, I can try again tomorrow.

My life, through no one's fault but my own, has been something of a rollercoaster, but through all the ups and downs, through all the highs and lows, there have always been things that kept, and continue to keep, me going.

The most important and enduring is my connection with nature. By the age of 2, I could be found on the rocks in front of our summer cottage at Pemaquid Point, Maine. There were tide pools to play in, seaweed to turn over to see what was underneath, starfish and periwinkles to talk to, the constant music of the waves, the wind, and the gulls; it is still the place I feel most connected to. It was, and is, a world of endless wonder and joy; a never ending source of delight.

From that point onward, the natural world has been a guide and a support system, something I can rely on in a world that often lacks in reliability. The cycle of seasons is completely dependable. At this time of year I know that the buds on the trees are beginning to awaken and grow, that daffodils are beginning to push up through the frozen earth under the snow, that summer in her turn will evolve into ripeness. Autumn's bright colors bring a blaze of warmth, a final fireworks display before submitting to the cold and quiet of Winter, the time to rest and reflect. Throughout the passage of each season there are signs to anticipate and look for, an ongoing indication that all is as it should be. Signs that give me courage, strength, a sense of wonder and beauty, great joy, and hope-always hope. The dance of the seasons, the endless palette of Nature's artwork, the miracles, large and small, that I see around me every day, and knowing that I am part of it all, causes my spirit to sing.

The Quechua inspired prayer that was shared with us a few weeks ago by Barbara Meyer resonated deeply with me, and perfectly describes my connection to the natural world, so I want to read it again:

“Great creator, grant me the light of wisdom.

Mother Earth, bountiful source.

Help me draw strength from the ground beneath my feet.

Father Sun, radiant child,

Fill me with the warmth and energy to face my trials.

Mountain spirits, who walk the wind,

Guide me on the path of resilience and determination.

May the sacred waters cleanse my soul,

And may the fires of transformation forge my spirit.

In unity with all living beings,

I embrace the power within me,

To overcome obstacles and grow ever stronger.”

**And there's this:**

**“Those little things that you alone see aren't by chance. The squirrel, the dragonfly, the whisper, the song, the lily, it's me. I am always with you. I'll do anything to reach you-to give you hope, keep you on track, answer your questions. Look even closer. The Universe” A quote from Carol Burczyk, Folklore, Customs, Legends, and Mythology.**

**There are, of course, many other things that enrich and sustain my life: music, my love of birds and animals, my lifelong love of reading, the purring of my Siamese cat when he's lying on my chest, a bit of gardening, wonderful friendships, my growing sense of gratitude, and not least of all, my curious mind; there is always something to explore and learn about-one lifetime isn't long enough!.**

**One's credo, however, is about more than what sustains one and nourishes one's soul, essential as those things are-they are only part of the story. What do I believe in, what defines my belief system?**

**When I became aware of racial injustice, during my high school years, I had an ongoing argument with my father, who was a racist. He believed in separate but equal, although I know he didn't have any idea about how appallingly unequal things were. I asked him why, if they were equal, they needed to be separate, and he had no adequate answer. No matter how many times the subject came up, he never changed his mind, and I never changed mine. We definitely had a failure to communicate. Until fairly recently, I've always seen things in black and white, right or wrong, and I believe that some things warrant that. The Holocaust was wrong. Slavery was wrong. A woman not having the right to choose her own reproductive health is wrong. Racism is wrong. Anti-semitism**

is wrong. Native American genocide was wrong. The death penalty is wrong. These are things that I will always take a stand on, that I will not compromise on; to me, they are unequivocally carved in stone. I am not afraid, and never have been, to stand up for what I believe in, and I am not afraid to say that I will never be less than that. If that offends you, step out of my light. Van Gogh understood this when he said: "I try more and more to be myself, caring relatively little whether people approve or disapprove". We all like approval of course, but living to court the approval of others is a waste of time, and I think it's dishonest as well; who was it that said you can't please all the people all the time? Take me or leave me for who I am-that's on you.

As I've gotten older, I've come to see that there are some core values that I want to really focus on. Kindness tops the list; I don't have to like everyone I meet or encounter but there is no reason to be unkind. I have no way of knowing what burdens they may be carrying, and it costs nothing to smile and say hello to people, to do or say some small thing that may make a difference to them. Kindness is like throwing a rock into a lake-the rock disappears out of sight, but the ripples keep spreading. Kindness is an expression of caring.

Courtesy is important to me. The good old magic words, please and thank you, seem to be in abeyance these days. I see it everywhere that customer service takes place, and I try to counter it by not only saying please, but thank you for your help, I really appreciate it. It makes a difference, no matter how small. Imagine if everybody did it-we might all smile more. I'm not rude to telemarketers, what's the point. Can you imagine a worse job? I hold doors for people, men and women. I let people with fewer items go ahead of me in the checkout line. I'm in no hurry and they may be. I give people compliments, even strangers, not because I'm trying to get them to like me, but because I think that we are at a disconnect from each other. Social media has allowed us to say horrible things to each other, things that we would never, I hope, say to

someone's face. There are no consequences for that kind of bad behavior, as there are in real life. Technology is great, but it's also causing a lot of separation between people: texting, email, FB messenger have all taken the place of face to face contact, and I don't think that's a good thing. Politeness and good manners matter.

Generosity is important to me. Years ago I read a phrase that I've never forgotten: we can always afford to be generous. I live on a small, fixed income, but generosity isn't just about money. Kindness, being helpful, giving of your time, paying it forward, being thoughtful, sharing what you have are all just as important, and sometimes I think, even more so. Anyone can write a check, and it's good that there are people who can help others and organizations with financial support-I wish I could do more-but the caring that prompts any sort of generosity should come from the heart, and we can all afford that.

High on the scale of importance is gratitude. I've never believed that prayer should be about asking a higher power for personal things or making deals. Conscious gratitude is a powerful thing. Throughout the day, I often say, to myself or out loud, thank you for my good life, thank you for this good day. I've come to see that compared to the majority of the world, I live a life of luxury, abundance, and good fortune: I have a roof over my head, running water, heat, more than enough to eat, the comfort of a fire at night, safety, things that most of the world lacks and would give anything to have. Before my evening meal, I give thanks to the animal that gave its life to sustain mine, to all the people who made the meal possible-the farmers, the migrants who harvest the crops, the truckers who transport it, the staff of the supermarket-we do not exist in a vacuum. Gratitude is a gift to the Universe.

And last, but certainly not least, is my love of, and need for solitude. I have never had any success at living with another human being, and I need solitude

to be happy. That's not to say that I don't love being with people-I do and have amazing friends who mean the world to me, but being alone (or as alone as you can be with 2 dogs and 2 cats) sustains me. The peace and quiet, not having demands made on me, being able to do what I please when I please, are all balm to my spirits. I need the time and freedom to enjoy my journey of self-exploration and spiritual growth, and for me, solitude is the key.

The following quote from the Talmud sums my credo up perfectly:

**“Live each day to the fullest. Get the most from each hour, each age of your life. Then you can look forward with confidence and look back without regrets. Be yourself, but be your best self. Dare to be different and to follow your own star. Don't be afraid to be happy. Enjoy what is beautiful. Love with all your heart and soul. Believe that those who love you, love you. Forget what you have done for your friends and remember what they have done for you. Disregard what the world owes you, and concentrate on what you owe the world. When you are faced with a decision, make the decision as wisely as possible-then forget it. The moment of certainty never arrives.”**

Wise words to live by, for all of us. And remember, no doubt the Universe is unfolding exactly as it should, so keep putting one foot in front of the other, and enjoy the journey.