**Unitarian Church of Montreal**

**Sunday Service: The Creative Process**

May 24, 2020

**Chalice Lighting**

Caite Clark

Hello! My name is Caite Clark, and I’m a part of the Unitarian Church of Montreal. Welcome to our virtual gathering this morning. It’s Sunday, May 24, and we'll be talking about the creative process. Now, join me in lighting our chalice. Our words today are by Steven Shick.

Creating Fire

Is the fire going out?
Not in your belly,
for you are still alive,
but in your soul,
that place

where dreams
fuel commitment

where longings
shape action

where meaning
flames purpose

where passion ignites
and rekindles

your life fire.

If your soul smolders
dream on
till you flame
like a chalice of hope.

**Introduction to “The Creative Process”**

Rev. Diane Rollert

Je vous souhaite la bienvenue à notre célébration, où nous allons explorer le processus creatif. Nous remercions tout particulièrement nos invités spéciaux: Diely Mori Tounkara et Josh Fink.

My name is Reverend Diane Rollert, and I serve the Unitarian Church of Montreal. I welcome you to this service, whenever and wherever you may be watching it.

Somehow, over the course of infinite time, out of stardust, we have come into being. And I don't see us being formed out of clay by a God with a long white beard, but I do marvel at the wondering that humanity has long expressed. Where do we come from? Why were we created? Are we here for some purpose?

To me, creation is all about finding meaning in our lives, especially in these challenging times. The focus of this service is to consider the creative process. And I believe that Unitarian Universalism truly affirms that we each have within us the capacity and the ability to be creative.

We don't have to be great artists or musicians or writers. You know, failure, pain, grief, anxiety can often push us to be our most creative in so many different ways. Just to bear witness to the day, to make it through, can be an act of creation, in and of itself.

Through video and through live discussion, we're going to hear from several people about their own experiences of the creative process. And we give special thanks for the music of Diely Mori Tounkara, who has graced our sanctuary in the past with the playing of his beautiful kora, the traditional instrument of his homeland in Mali, and to Josh Fink, who will share some live thoughts about L'école de violoncelle de Montréal, a program for young children from families who wouldn't otherwise have the resources to be able to take advantage of a program at this level of education. The program was being offered at the Unitarian Church of Montreal until the pandemic came. And so they had to get very creative in response.

May this service inspire your own creativity.

**Opening Music**

Diely Mori Tounkara

**Time for All Ages**

Katherine Childs

Hi, everyone! For our Time for All Ages today, I wanted to share a picturebook with you. It’s called *Sky Color,* and it’s written and illustrated by an author named Peter H. Reynolds.

Now, when we get together in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings, if I want to share a picturebook with you, I usually tell you the story of the picturebook, instead of holding up the book and showing it to you, because when we’re in a really big room it can be hard for everybody to see the pictures. But because we’re all at home now, and because I’m recording this as a video to share with you, I can talk a little bit about this book and why it’s so important to me, and why I’m excited to share it with you, and then I can show you a video of somebody reading the book, so that you can see the amazing illustrations.

Peter H. Reynolds is a really popular children’s illustrator, and he’s written and illustrated lots of books about kindness, and creativity, and how to grow and become better as a person. I really, really love his work. And I especially love this story, because it’s a story about creativity, and looking for creativity in places that we might not usually see it. So I’m excited to share this with you. This is *Sky Color,* by Peter H. Reynolds, read by Allie Lamb.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_j2Ta4IxU9Q>

**Song**

“Dear Weaver of Our Life’s Design”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert with Sandra Hunt

**The Creative Process in a Time of Pandemic: Two Perspectives:**

**Interviews with Shirley and Hendrik**



Shirley: My name is Shirley. I'm now a high school student studying at École Saint-Luc. I'm originally from China, and have been in Montreal since the end of 2018.

Hendrik: My name is Hendrik, and I've been told that I look like God when I’m talking into my tablet in this position. But that’s—I’m not God. [*Chuckles.*] I was born in Amsterdam. My first five years I spent in Holland, in a small village in the east end of Holland where my father was a mathematics teacher in high school. He ended up moving to Canada. My mother decided at the time of the Berlin Airlift that it was time to get out of there, the war was about to start again, and came to Canada in 1952.

Shirley: I live with my parents. My mom came to Canada first. Someone recommended the Unitarian Church to her. Then she took me here as soon as I came. I find that it's a wonderful community, and I quite enjoy my time here.

Hendrik: I arrived in a country where I didn't know the language. Sort of—in Kingston, at the school there—I was treated by everybody as kind of this strange village idiot, because . . . I don't know why. I ended up moving to Winnipeg, had a better time in high school there because I picked up with a few nerds that were kind of like me. I became very much a mathematician. At university I discovered computers, and I've been involved with computers ever since. I still view myself as a mathematician who has become a computer programmer.

Shirley: My daily routine really changes a lot because of the pandemic. I have to study at home, having online courses from school each week. I get up later than usual, but unfortunately I do have homework. I help my mom explore new recipes in the kitchen. And I start to do some workouts. And most of all, I have enough time for art, which is my favorite hobby.

Hendrik: The creative endeavor I have is indeed writing and programming, also figuring out mathematics.

Shirley: I'm doing drawing and painting. Staying at home is a good time for art, as I mentioned. I have plenty of free time. I do mostly pencil drawing, because it requires less material, and it's easier to start and end. Now, at this time, I also do paintings. Colors helped me feel less stressed; placing all the pens and brushes on my desk neatly is like a ritual, which helps me calm down. I really enjoy mixing several basic colors together, observe the changement they make, and try to get the color I want. It's kind of like an experiment, full of uncertainties. [*Shows one of her drawings.*]

Hendrik: It wasn't until about 20 years ago that I got into writing more seriously. I took images in my head that I wanted to put down on paper. Well, I ended up with a few sentences on a computer screen, and those sentences changed from time to time but they stayed on the computer screen for about two years. Over those two years, almost very little happened to them; but I still had these images and I wanted to do something with them. And I called some friends of mine, and they both said I had to go to the workshop on writing that's held on Thursday nights at the Thomas Moore Institute. So I signed up, and somehow I did one or two of the exercises, and something unlocked. I don't know what it was it unlocked, but it was definitely unlocked.

Shirley: [*Showing another drawing.*] I'm surrounded by all kinds of information, and some of them inspire me and let me have the passion of creating something of my own. These ideas came to me randomly. For example, when I play the game to arrange some scores of different colors, according to their hue, I'm amazed that there are so many different kinds of gray. And I immediately decide to paint something including all of these colorful grays! And here it is. To mix the yellow and purple together, and then you kind of get some different grays. And once I have a clear idea in my mind, things get easier. I just welcome them from time to time. This is how I work with this one. [*Showing various pictures.*] And here is a practice that I do, it's a pencil drawing. It's actually a reference, and I still didn't finish it. I saw some really pretty photos on Instagram and I decided to draw them. And this one is a friend of mine, that I did this drawing.

Hendrik: There's one thing about programming: it's different from writing numbers. You have somebody to talk to about it, namely the computer. And you have a feedback process, where it keeps telling you, giving you information about what you’ve got to do now if you're going to get anything at all to work, and that interaction really, really helps. You don't have that in writing a novel. I didn't really know what my book was about until I finished the first draft, and it wasn't even then; it was months after I finished the first draft that I figured out what it was about. You don't know what your book is about until you've written it. You know what you think it's going to be about, but you may very well be very, very wrong.

Shirley: Usually the creativity comes from our daily lives. And we get inspired by even the smallest things, and different people have different creative processes. This is how it works with me.

*We are here to abet creation and to witness to it, so that nature need not play to an empty house.*

**About L'****école de violoncelle de Montréal**

Josh Fink

*Rev. Diane: I would like to invite Josh Fink to help us to understand more about the École de violoncelle de Montréal and the creative process that they've gone through in the time of this pandemic.*

It's very nice to be here with everyone this morning, thank you for inviting me. I would just like to share with you a few of the things we've been doing to allow this to be a special experience for all the children we're working with, in the face of the pandemic. We had three really, really wonderful weekends at the Unitarian Church; the kids absolutely loved meeting there, and they miss it greatly, and we are excited to be back as soon as it's healthy and safe to do so.

One of the things we've done is, right away we created these practice cellos, we call them, which are very beautiful imitations of the cello that have allowed the kids to figure out where to put their fingers down, on the left hands, prior to having an instrument. And one of the fathers of our children was very creative, and he added rubber bands to his child's practice cello, which also allowed them to pluck with their right hand in addition to placing the fingers down. Sandra has an example there, and you'll also see it in the video at the end when I'm done talking. And once the other children in the program saw this one practice cello, they all added rubber bands to their practice cellos, which was really really nice to see. And we were able to mail these out to all the children, which was a way to immediately stay in touch with them and to get them something that represented an instrument, before we could get them real cellos.

Another thing we did is, we created a YouTube channel, and we now have, I think, upwards of 600 videos that the kids can practice along to, so that they're constantly in touch with us and able to practice alongside of us. And I think as of right now our YouTube channel has something of 50,000 views over the past few months, and an average of about 600 views every day. So you can do the math; we have 15 kids in our program, and 600 views a day means that these kids are really taking music seriously and having a good time playing music and learning music.

There's a lot of different types of videos that we've been putting up, and one of the videos that the kids love the most are these videos that Sandra has made, where she recorded herself playing the piano accompaniment for all the music the children are playing on their instruments. So they can go to YouTube, and they can play along with Sandra, even though they can't be with Sandra in person; any time they want, she's right there, and her piano’s there.

So we have a video we want to share, which is one of our students. She is a very dedicated young musician; she's been playing for a few months now, and her video will show you all of the things I just talked about coming together: she's playing along with Sandra at home, and she's playing her practice cello with her added strings onto it.

We've just been blown away at these kids! We have 15 of them and they're putting in such an effort, and really doing their best to make the most of the situation, and love music, and enjoy it. So without further ado, here she is, playing *Allegro.*

**Music**

A student of L'école de violoncelle de Montréal, with Sandra Hunt

“Allegro”

**Share the Plate**

Shoshanna Green

Hi, bonjour. My name is Shoshanna Green, my pronouns are *she* and *her,* and I’m a member of the congregation at the Unitarian Church of Montreal.

In May, for our Share the Plate program, we’re donating to Communitas. Communitas helps people who are returning from prison to successfully reintegrate into the community in and around Montreal. They offer both services and support to ease each step of the process. At the heart of all their programming is the joint participation of volunteers with former and current prisoners. Together they use the principles of restorative justice to create a safer community by building relationships that help people face the challenges of reintegration. They operate on a small budget; their fundraising goal for 2019 was only 18 thousand dollars, which they reached on the very last day of the year.

Our contributions this month can make a significant difference. If you can make a financial donation this month, please visit their website: communitasmontreal.org —C-O- M-M-U-N-I-T-A-S-M-O-N-T-R-E-A-L (all one word) dot O-R-G. And if you aren’t in a position to give money right now, know that you make a difference in all the other ways you support and strengthen our church community, our city, and our world.

Thank you for sharing your gifts.

**Song**

“In Time of Silver Rain”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert

**Reading**

lecture de Colum McCann

Dany Brown

Bonjour. Mon nom est Dany. Creation does not go without perseverance. To this end, I offer you a text by the Irish novelist Colum McCann, from *Letters to a Young Writer: Some Practical and Philosophical Advice,* published in 2017, translated by Belfond the following year.

Samuel Beckett l’a dit mieux que quiconque, et cela mérite d’être répété, répété, répété: ‘Peu importe. Essaie encoure. Echoue encore. Echoue mieux.’

L’échec est utile. L’échec n’exclut pas l’ambition. L’échec incite à la bravoure. L’échec donne de l’audace. Il faut du courage pour échouer et plus encoure pour admettre qu l’on va echouer. Vise au-delà de toi. La vraie témérité consiste à ouvrir sa boîte aux lettres en sachant qu’elle contiendra une nouvelle lettre de rejet. Ne la déchire pas. Ne la brûle pas. Sers-t’en plûtot de tapisserie. Conserve-la et relis-la de temps en temps. Pense que, dans quelques années, tu la regarderas avec nostalgie. Elle se cornera, jaunira et tu te rappelleras ce que tu ressantais autrefois, quand tu lançais des mots contre ton supposé silence. L’échec est revigorant. Tu sais que tu vaux mieux que ça. L’échec te fait lever le matin. Te fait circuler le sang. Te dilate les narines. Te commande d’écrire une histoire plus forte, une meilleure histoire.

**Reflection**

Diely Mori Tounkara

*not recorded*

**Music for Meditation**

Diely Mori Tounkara



**Closing Song**

“Spirit of Life”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert

**Closing Words**

Rev. Diane Rollert

For our closing words, I want to offer this from Maxine Hong Kingston, Chinese American author and professor: “In a time of destruction, create something. A poem. A parade. A friendship. A community. A place that is the commons. A school. A vow. A moral principle. One peaceful moment.” And will you join me in the benediction that we often said in our sanctuary?

Go out into the world in peace.

Have courage.

Hold on to what is good.

Return to no person evil for evil.

Strengthen the faint-hearted.

Support the weak.

Help the suffering.

Honor all beings.

Allons dans le monde en paix.

Soyons courageux.

Retenons ce qui est bien.

Ne rendons à personne œil pour œil.

Renforçons les cœurs meurtris.

Soutenons les faibles.

Aidons ceux qui souffrent.

Honorons toute vie.

And with that, I extinguish this chalice that's been burning here with me today.