Poetry of Coincidences and Social Nets

Ivan Blatny was a young promising Czech writer and poet. Then, in 1948, the Communists took over power and he escaped to England. Uprooted from his home, language, family and friends, he was completely lost, and he experienced recurring episodes of disorientation. The British National Health Services sent him first to a psychiatric hospital and then to a sanatorium. By the time he got to that sanatorium, no one around him knew that he was a published poet (although in another language).

His constant scribbling on any piece of paper he could lay his hands on was seen as part of his peculiar eccentricity. Many decades later, one of the nurses paid attention to his scribbles. Ivan was rediscovered as a literary figure. After many years spent in the sanatorium he remained there until his death, but he was able to publish two more excellent collections of highly interesting code-switching poetry (part Czech, part English).

When I came to Rutgers, there had been a homeless man sleeping regularly on the church steps. He was very shy. Not many people noticed him and even fewer managed to speak more than a sentence with him. He would come quite late and get up early and would always sleep right by the door. The custodial staff kept an eye on him, helped several times to store his stuff, and they protected him a few times. Our good-hearted accountant, Tina, gave him some warm clothing and one winter she bought him a sturdy sleeping bag. He did not take it right away, waiting for several months. He really was very shy. Once or twice, when it was bitterly cold, we had to call #311 for shelter responders; we were worried he might freeze on our steps.

Over the last summer an elder of our church started to bring him breakfast and established and built up trust and a relationship. Thus we learned quite a surprising story. His name was Mirumil, and he was originally from the Czech Republic. He escaped to America shortly after the Russian troops crushed political hopes during the Prague Spring of 1968. At that time he studied mathematics at the university. Here in NYC he got by by taking some menial jobs. Uprooted, without family, or any close community or friends, something happened. He lost his documents, job and home and ended up on the street.

When I started to write about it, the church elder expressed it very nicely: "In reaching out and doing small things, individually we can make real differences in other people’s lives. The first morning I brought Mirumil breakfast, I had just learned that my uncle had passed away after a battle with cancer. Events like this make you focus on what is truly important - life is short and we have value through serving others and doing God’s work... we have the power to take actions which can have real impact.”
**Rutgers Church Community Programs**

Dave Mammen, Church Administrator, spoke recently with Somer Adams and Monika Fisher, homeroom instructors in the Preschool Alternative Program, offered Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings from 9 am to 12 noon. Families can enroll children for either two or three days; admission is on a first come, first served basis.

**Dave:** I understand that the Preschool Alternative Program is a program for kids who are 3 – 5 years old, getting ready for kindergarten. Tell me about a typical morning.

**Somer:** The day starts with free play—children can choose to dress-up for dramatic play, pretend cooking, blocks, puzzles, or a book from our reading corner—all in our beautiful new classroom space. (Thank you, Building Use Committee!)

**Monika:** After about 20 minutes when everyone has arrived and settled in, we move to circle time. We talk about the calendar for the day, and discuss months and seasons. We have a days-of-the-week song we like to sing together.

**Somer:** Kids get their jobs for the day, which could be line leader; germ buster; story time chooser; clean up captain; or weather announcer. I think parent greeter is one of the most popular; they get to open the door and say “come on in, it’s time for pick up”. We have various enrichment activities (we call them specials), which may occur either in the homeroom, the art studio or gym. Depending on the day we might have story time, yoga, dance, art, music, soccer, Mandarin, or crafts. Snack time is around 11 a.m. Then we sit together and read a story. Tuesdays and Wednesdays end with art, and Thursdays with soccer. Then it’s back to our homeroom to pack up and sing goodbye.

**Dave:** Sounds like a lot of fun! Is this the next step up from the “On My Own” playgroups that are offered here at Rutgers?

**Somer:** Exactly. While the emphasis is on learning through play, it’s more than a playgroup; the kids are learning to make new friends, follow instructions, and help each other. We’re a little community in our homeroom. These are important Pre-K skills which will help prepare them for kindergarten.

**Dave:** We’ve had a surge in enrollment and now the program is near capacity. What is it that attracts families to the program?

**Monika:** Some of our kids go to other programs on Mondays and Fridays, and we hear that they like their time with us because we emphasize play—and we’re not afraid to be silly! Some of our kids go from Rutgers on to formal Pre-K programs before kindergarten. But there’s a shortage of Pre-K spots, and many stay with us for 2 years then are ready for kindergarten.

**Dave:** I understand you both studied at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy (AMDA) here in New York City. Is that where you met?

**Somer:** We both have a musical theater background. But we didn’t know each other at AMDA. We first crossed paths here at Rutgers, and we’ve been working together since 2009. When I was young, I had the chance to come out of my shyness by participating in theatre and music. We would have 90 minute lunch periods, and made up elaborate stories with pretend towns and businesses. That’s how I found myself, and now I try to encourage kids to do their best and find their own strengths.

**Monika:** Where I was young, my family moved from Poland to Sweden, and I went to schools that emphasized free play, creativity, and art. I loved school; even though I was shy and didn’t speak Swedish, I was surrounded by people who encouraged me and made me feel safe. That’s the environment we try to provide here at Rutgers.

**Dave:** What do you have planned for this summer?

**Somer:** This summer, our program will be called Ready, Set, Go. We’ll have two 4-week sessions, in June and July. We’re planning a Teddy Bear picnic, some scavenger hunts, and a summer safari, along with storytelling, art and crafts, gym—and of course, plenty of free play time.

**Dave:** Where I was young, my family crossed paths here at Rutgers, and we’ve been working together since 2009. When I was young, I had the chance to come out of my shyness by participating in theatre and music. We would have 90 minute lunch periods, and made up elaborate stories with pretend towns and businesses. That’s how I found myself, and now I try to encourage kids to do their best and find their own strengths.

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**Somer:** Adams is a graduate of AMDA and holds a teacher’s associate from the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing. “I am thrilled to work for a program dedicated to the development of children, and passionate about doing so in a warm and creative environment.”

**Monika:** Fisher studied at AMDA and holds a BA from City College. “Everything from my wonderful co-workers to the kids that bring their contagious curiosity and energy make each day a new learning experience filled with adventures.”

**Dave:** Last year was a historic year for weather-related disasters. In March we witnessed the destruction left in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan. This island nation continues to face multiple challenges as it recovers from the disaster. The National Weather Service reported that there were close to 1,500 tornadoes across the United States, including a rare tornado in Massachusetts. Heavy rain and melting snow caused historic flooding in the Ohio Valley and wiped out thousands of acres of farmland in the Upper Midwest. In the Southern Plains, drought, heat wave and wildfires caused unimaginable devastation. Through your gifts and the gifts of other congregations across the church, OGHS will continue to be a reminder that through the simple act of sharing, we are blessed and experience God’s abundance in surprising ways. Thank you for supporting this offering. This year we will be receiving the offering on Easter Sunday, April 8.
What’s Up With S.K.A.T.E.?

Our S.K.A.T.E. kids have had a busy winter. In November we ice skated at Wollman rink in Central Park and were treated to the spectacle of the fireworks honoring the New York Marathon. Our 8th graders and up participated in the Youth Service Opportunity Project in December spending Friday evening cooking for and sharing a meal with a group of homeless men. Then on Saturday, we worked cooking and serving hot meals to people in Queens and in the Bronx.

In January, we attended a rousing performance of Godspell. February gave us a potluck and game night at the church building and in March the older S.K.A.T.E. kids participated in the 2nd Annual Winter Retreat at the Stony Point Conference Center.

May and June promise outdoor activities for our Friday night events. Many of our kids have also stayed after the worship service this winter to enjoy pizza together.

Through February and March the entire Rutgers church family has participated in a “Support S.K.A.T.E.” campaign. The money raised through hand decorated envelopes displayed on a bulletin board in the Daniel Russell room will help to defray the cost of some special S.K.A.T.E. activities in 2012 and beyond. At this writing we have raised $772.00.

Vera Mowry Roberts Memorial College Education Grants Available for High School Students

Rutgers Presbyterian Church received a generous gift from the estate of Vera Mowry Roberts to be used to provide college grants for our active youth participants. Over the last few months a sub-committee of the Christian Education Committee has been working to establish criteria for these grants. These grants are available for any Rutgers High School Senior heading off to college who has been an active member of the church and the youth programs for the 2 preceding years. Applications are available on the church website or in the church office.

The Christian Education Committee has also established a college education grant from this fund which will go to a current college bound resident of the WSSH’s Grandparent’s House.

Welcoming Children and Families

During December our Sunday School kids were busy rehearsing for the children’s Christmas program entitled “A Traditional Christmas Pageant.” This was presented during the worship service on December 18. We also held a tree trimming party for the Christmas tree in the Daniel Russell room. Church families, VBS families, and weekday program families all attended. Everyone had a good time making ornaments and eating pizza and Christmas cookies.

Families were invited to celebrate Valentine’s Day on a Friday evening in February. Again, church families, VBS families, and weekday program families were in attendance. We made beautiful Valentine’s, played Valentine’s bingo and enjoyed a light supper of chicken soup and French bread.

In Sunday school we are learning about the meaning of the season of Lent. We made pretzels as a reminder that prayer is an important part of our Lenten journey.

Our Sunday school children also continue to support a Rwandan boy Claude with their weekly offerings through the ministry of World Vision.

Ivy

March 2012 at Rutgers Church and Beyond

(Continue from 1st page)

In the autumn we celebrated his 65th birthday. Our elder prepared a delicious honey cake. And while we ate it, we learned more helpful details. Mirumil was born in a small city in Moravia. I knew that place, because my best friend grew up there. Mirumil’s high school teacher, who inspired him to study mathematics, was my friend’s school headmaster. With a little bit of internet searching I was able to find out and communicate with the city registry office and soon we got a copy of Mirumil’s birth certificate. By that time he also agreed to go to a shelter without risking another winter on our steps. Meanwhile the elder initiated the process toward the recovery of his SSN and his immigration card. As soon as he had all the documents, we hoped to help him find some more permanent accommodations and work.

Pastor Andrew
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<th>Sun</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Palm Sunday service with procession</td>
<td>2 12:15 p.m. Al-Anon Every Monday</td>
<td>3 11:00 a.m. Support Group for Unemployed persons</td>
<td>4 3:00 p.m. Worship Committee 5:30 p.m. AA Meeting Every Wednesday</td>
<td>5 6:00 p.m. Meal Program 7:00 p.m. Maundy Thursday</td>
<td>6 7:00 p.m. Good Friday</td>
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<td>2 12:30 p.m. SKATE Pizza Lunch</td>
<td>12:45 p.m. Deacons Meeting</td>
<td>4 12:15 p.m. Al-Anon Every Tuesday</td>
<td>6:30 p.m. Giving Network Local Subcommittee</td>
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<td>7 6:00 p.m. AA Meeting Every Saturday</td>
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<td>8 9:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Morning Easter Service</td>
<td>9 Easter Monday Church House &amp; Office Building Closed all day</td>
<td>10 6:30 p.m. Session Meeting 8:00 p.m. Men’s Al-Anon Every Tuesday</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Easter Breakfast</td>
<td>11 6:00 p.m. Meal Program 7:00 p.m. Movie Series Every Thursday</td>
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<td>12 1:00 p.m. Opera Rehearsal</td>
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<td>11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Feasting with the Resurrected</td>
<td>6:45 p.m. Easter Egg Hunt -P S J N Meeting</td>
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<td>15 9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Adult Forum resumes through July</td>
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<td>14 1:00 p.m. Opera Rehearsal</td>
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<td>23 7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>The Larkspur Trio Recital (Concerts in Motion Benefit)</td>
<td>24 8:00 a.m. Board of Elections</td>
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<td>29 2:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Opera Performance “La Gioconda”</td>
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<td>27 7:30 p.m. Gail Archer’s Organ Recital</td>
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<td>30 6:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>28 10:00 a.m. John Lembo’s Memorial Service</td>
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### April Birthdays!

1. Hayden Coudal-Jones
2. Nicole Byrns, Lily Santiago, Trey Santiago
3. Mary Beth Coudal
4. Massimo Maglione
5. James Finn
6. Lisa Pinto
7. Bob Shelton
8. Gladys Morris
9. Jennifer Finn, Cass Knox
10. Beth Childs
11. Carl Lindskoog
12. Samuel Reggio
13. Charles Platt
14. Joy Rose

### Also on Sundays

- 10:00 Adult Choir Rehearsal
- 10:45 Infant & Child Care
- 11:00 Worship Service
- 11:15 Sunday School
- 12:15 p.m. Coffee Hour
- 12:45 Choir Rehearsal
From the Director of Music

On behalf of James Balmer and myself, we would like to thank you all for the amazing opportunity to serve you through the music ministry at Rutgers Church. Jim and I are thrilled and feel incredibly blessed. A number of years ago, I was asked to come to Rutgers and sub on a Sunday morning. I remember receiving a warm welcome and feeling very much at home. Today, that has not changed, a testament to the fact that Rutgers IS a warm, welcoming and inviting congregation. You are truly who you say you are each Sunday morning and Jim and I both are so happy to call you our church home! We know that the Search Committee and the Worship Committee members deserve our heartfelt thanks. And we are extremely grateful to each and every member of the choir for always making us welcome. Working with Pastor Andrew and the staff here at Rutgers is truly a pleasure! As I said, we are richly blessed!

As we are nearing Holy Week, please take note of the inclusion of Faure’s *Requiem* as part of our Good Friday worship service. On Easter Sunday we plan to have a wonderful brass quartet to add to our joyful Easter celebration. If at any time you have an interest in joining our choir – or you would simply like to ‘try choir’ – please speak to Jim or myself. We would love new members and I’m sure you will be most welcomed as well!

Thank you all for blessing our lives so richly!

Mary Nelson

News from Session

After months of research, we now have a definitive figure, 120, for our membership here at Rutgers Church! We are proud to note that Louisa Berry is our newest member, transferring to Rutgers from Central Presbyterian Church. She is # 120! We know Louisa from her work with the Cub Scouts and older Boy Scouts, and her donation of time to the Special Events Committee.

Speaking of members, Pastor Stehlik is offering a “new member” series of gatherings, to share with potential new members the story of the Presbyterian Church, our faith, our goals, and we will be sharing our own faith stories, and what we bring to Rutgers Church. Interested? Please contact Pastor Andrew.

As a Presbyterian Church we are linked to all other congregations in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. denomination via our membership in the New York City Presbytery. As an organization, the Presbytery approves various actions we take, such as approving our Session minutes [just approved, some 400 pages of minutes!], approving the salaries paid to Clergy staff, and welcoming a representative from Rutgers to participate in Presbytery meetings. That representative is Elder Lynne Morris, as elected by our Session to represent us, along with Pastor Stehlik.

Building-wise, Session is now working with our Trustees and Building Use Committee as we determine priorities for major capital repairs on this 87 year-old building. There are repairs to be made, but also improvements, some which relate to new technologies, potential air conditioning, ecological improvements, helping to “green” the church campus, including our two buildings on Broadway.

There are plans for a Contemplative Retreat in May for church members. Finally we look forward to celebrating with joy the 50th anniversary of Rev. Charles Amstein’s ordination during worship on June 3rd.

Alice Hudson,

Scouts Move Up

On Friday, March 2nd, three Cub Scouts received their Arrow of Light, which is the highest award a Cub can earn, and then moved up to the Troop.

These new Boy Scouts are joined by a fourth young man who has just joined the Troop two weeks ago (and has already been on a camping trip with them).

Louisa Berry
What Do You Think?

1. Thank you is muttered, cursing is blasted.
2. Don’t let the opinion of others limit your dreams and desires.
3. Do people die too young or is their mission/purpose on earth finished?
4. Are you letting jealousy or envy control your life?
5. What you carry for yourself is enough.
6. My daughter asked me, “if you read the same book, will you tell the same story?”
7. Can you always recognize a blessing?
8. Be in competition with yourself.
9. You can’t walk in someone else’s shoes.
10. **STOP EMBARRASSING YOURSELF!!!**

‘Till next time,

Jacquelyn M. Carpenter