Repainting Our Lives

BY **SUSAN LAMAR,** RETIRED PARISH MINISTER, UXBRIDGE, MA

Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman's dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called pentimento because the painter "repented," changed his mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by the later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again.

(Lillian Hellman, from *Pentimento: A Book of Portraits,* 1973)

Like the canvas in this passage, our life canvases carry all of our pictures, all of our story. Sometimes our earlier pictures show through, obvious to us *and* to the people around us. Our parents remember us as children; as our own children grow, we remember them in all their stages. Spouses remember each other as they were when they first met, when they first fell in love.

Sometimes the early pictures are not transparent to others, but they are there, in our own inner landscapes. Choices, fond memories and regrets mingle to form the final canvas. The child inside the elder is still there, somewhere.

There are so many images sketched on all of our hearts. Layer upon layer of them. One that always stands out for me is of an elderly gentleman I met many years ago during a hospital chaplaincy. He was in for some tests, but was not particularly sick. Bored, mostly. We had not had an opportunity to talk at any length until this one particular afternoon, when he asked me to sit down. I sat in the chair beside his bed, and he sat in his hospital gown on the side of the bed, legs dangling.

"Do you like being a chaplain?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"That's good," he said, "It's good to be happy in your work."

There was a pause.

"Tell me about *your* work," I ventured.

There was a long pause, and then he stared directly into my eyes, his anguish palpable. "I was a merchant of death," he said.

"Tell me," I said quietly.

"I was an engineer. I designed guided missile systems. I was good, too. But…" Another pause, and a deep breath. "I made a good living," he continued. "Nice house, put my kids through college. They're all teachers and social workers, you know. *Very* important work…. I did very well…. But…." Another long pause; another deep breath.

"I remember toward the end, just before I retired. We had designed a new system, and were running a simulated test. Sure enough, the system worked, just as we planned. The bomb landed within ten feet of its target. And my whole team *cheered.* They *cheered.* And…I lost it," he said. "I screamed at them: *Stop it, just stop it! We just killed people. You don't cheer when you kill people."*

He swung his legs up on to the bed and lay back, lost in his thoughts.

A few moments later his granddaughter walked into the room, a young adult, recently graduated from Harvard with a degree in social work, and the gentleman transformed right before my eyes. The cloud disappeared, and his face was radiant with joy and pride and love as he introduced us.

Quest

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Because things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are.

—Bertolt Brecht

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT CHANGE

I excused myself, but that image has stayed with me all these years—the simultaneous anguish and pride painted on that gentleman's countenance, his canvas. A personal canvas that held those two pictures—a job that provided a good living, that launched his children and through them his grandchildren into work that will better humanity. And a career that also provides him distress and sorrow as he looks back on his life. The cloud and the glory, simultaneously. Pentimento. Repentance.

Repentance is, after all, a theological word for the deliberate choice to change. To paint a new picture on the canvas of our lives. Isn't that the way most of our lives work? Layer upon layer as we walk forward making our choices and changing our minds. Repainting…repenting….

We never know how many times we will be given the opportunity to make different choices. All we know is that we *can* make new and different choices as we journey along. We can repent.

Repent. What a charged word! We don't hear it much in the secular world, and rarely in Unitarian Universalism. In fact, I grew up thinking it was a joke. I only ever saw it in cartoons, where ratty-looking bearded men in robes carried signs saying, *"Repent, ye sinners!"* We, after all, were UUs! Sometimes it seemed that there was an underlying assumption that we would never have anything to repent from. Since we didn't believe in sin, then, hey, we're set!

But since then I've come to think it just might be a useful word. The way *repent* is used in our culture, its meaning has three distinct aspects:

First, it has to do with feeling remorse. And I mean to really, deeply feel and own regret, humiliation or shame for something you have done. Yes, all of those are very charged words. There is an element of despair in those difficult feelings. How, we might ask, can I ever fix this, make right the wrong that I have done or caused? How can I change what has already been done? When we have these feelings they touch our soul, and they sting. Even years later, when we remember the situation, those feelings come flooding back. They have left their mark on our canvas.

Then there is the second aspect of repentance. The *cognitive* decision never to do again the action that caused this anguish. There is movement from feeling to reason.

> Repentance is, after all, a theological word for the deliberate choice to change.

And the third part is action. To actually never again do the action that caused the anguish. In other words, to change, to transform. This includes, of course, recognizing a whole universe or set of actions that count under the umbrella of those from which to refrain. If cheating on a history test was cause for repentance, then the vow should cover cheating on other subjects, or on income taxes, and so on.

All the parts—the *feelings* right down to your toes, the *decision* to change and the *actual* change are equally important. The transformation that we are striving for is inside the deepest reaches of our being, a change in our soul, a link between feelings, will, and action.

It is life work that is never done, and in my opinion is not done in public. Soul work is done in private, although its effects are seen in public. I think some folks get this exactly backwards. Public figures say, "I have repented!" as though their transgression is never to be seen again on the canvas of their lives. Yet, in a way, this form of repentance is like being in recovery from an addiction. You are never fully recovered; repentance is never completely over and done.

Our mistakes, our bad choices, our errors in judgment, even criminal activities are always with us. We can feel the remorse, and we can move on to make new and different choices, but the results can only be judged over a long time. And *never solely by us.* We have to do the work, but whether we have really changed will show in our lives—and that is about our relationships with others.

Maybe that is why repentance is such a difficult notion. We don't want control to be taken away from us. We want to be able to say, "It's over and done. It's water under the bridge. I've changed." Especially if we have. Because we do change, all the time. But our actions forever live with us—actions that went before *and* those from our changed selves as we go forward.

What I like about the *pentimento* image is that although the word shares a root with repentance, it directs our attention to a different place. It can spring us out of the dark and difficult connotations that I've been talking about. It helps us shift into the realm of opportunity to do things differently. It assures us that there is always an opportunity to paint a different picture. That there is always an opportunity to wake up and be transformed so that others *will* notice the difference, even though the old image is still with us.

Our awakenings happen over the course of our lifetimes. As years go by we change, sometimes just by virtue of having more experience, wider and deeper observations of the effects of our actions, a closer relationship to our deepest, most ultimate values.

That gentleman, sitting on the edge of his hospital bed, so anguished about his career, also held a beautiful painting of his life through the values he passed on to his children and grandchildren. Perhaps even telling his story to me helped him come to terms with his life. His pentimento life.

We all have pentimento lives.
May we paint with care. ■

Transitions, Expected and Unexpected

BY **JOSH PAWELEK**,
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Reading #655 in our hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition,* is entitled, "Change Alone is Unchanging." It's attributed to the ancient Greek philosopher Heraklietos, also known as the *weeping philosopher.* "In searching for the truth," he says, "be ready for the unexpected. Change alone is unchanging."

These words ring true to me, the same truth I encounter in Rev. Vanessa Rush Southern's meditation, "Expect Chaos" from her book, *This Piece of Eden*. She says, "Perhaps change *is* life. Frustrations and snags *are* life. Maybe instead of being taught to expect stability and predictability, we should have been taught to expect chaos, or at least constant transitions."

Change alone is unchanging. As long as I'm alive—and conscious of my living—I can expect to experience change. Certainly there will be changes in the wider world around me: nations and governments change; cultures and social norms change; human knowledge and technology change; ecology and climate change; the seasons and the positions of the stars in the night sky change. Certainly there will be changes in the more immediate patterns of my life: My children will grow older and my role in their life will change. My parents will grow older and my role in their lives will change. My wife will grow older; I will grow older.

I can reasonably expect changes in my work life. I can reasonably expect changes in where I live. People will come in and out of my life—friends, parishioners, colleagues, peers, activists. I can expect the changes retirement brings. I can expect the changes illness brings. I can expect the changes loss brings, and the changes that come when a loved one dies.

And as a result of all these changes and transitions I can also expect my inner life to change in response: what I believe, what matters to me, the things to which I feel called to dedicate time and energy, my understanding of the sacred. All of it has already changed through the course of my life. I can only conclude more change lies ahead.

Change alone is unchanging. I suspect this is not news to you. At some place deep in our bones we sense this idea is true. It speaks directly to Unitarian Universalists' common yearning for a religious life not bound by doctrines, creeds and revelations presented to us as the one, eternal truth, as the final word revealed once long ago and sealed forever. We long for spiritual openness. We are comfortable, even, with spiritual open-endedness.

We long for a spiritual community that asks us not to submit to one truth, but rather to explore truth from many perspectives and construct meaning from many sources. We long for a faith informed as much by scientific discovery and changes in human knowledge as it is by ancient wisdom.

We certainly don't long for chaos, and we want our children to experience stability and predictability, but when we encounter this idea that "change alone is unchanging" something may stir in us. Often our gut response is "yes." We want to hear more because we experience our lives, all life, the earth, the universe not as static, but as dynamic. Change *is* life.

But let's be honest: as a concept, as a starting place for deeper theological reflection, okay, this idea is fabulous. Change alone is unchanging, yes. But as a practical matter, when it comes to dealing with day-to-day life, it's not so great. It doesn't matter what height of spiritual discipline you've achieved, the unexpected can really mess up your day. Even Jesus lost it from time to time. For human beings (and I'm sure for other creatures as well) change is hard.

As spiritually and intellectually exhilarating as the idea of change is, the physical and emotional experience can be a real drag. I wouldn't be surprised if this is why the ancient Greeks referred to Heraklietos as the weeping philosopher.

> "In searching for the truth, be ready for the unexpected. Change alone is unchanging."
> —Heraklietos

I think back to the summer of 1999 when my wife and I first moved to Connecticut. Over the previous ten years I had grown deeply accustomed to my life in Boston. I was grounded in the student culture in Cambridge. I was grounded in the local rock music scene. I was grounded in my ties to the Unitarian Universalist Association, which is headquartered in Boston. My twin brother and some of my best friends lived there. I was embedded in a rich network of peers, clergy, UUs, musicians, activists and Ultimate Frisbee players. I knew all the running routes along the Charles River. I knew my way around by car and public transportation. My life had a certain stability and predictability to it.

We moved to Connecticut that summer and I became ill. I was chronically dizzy and nauseated. I lacked appetite. I lost weight. I drank ginger tea all the time, hoping it would settle my stomach. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. It took many medical tests to prove to me there was nothing physically wrong with me, and two or three years of therapy to convince me that what had caused these symptoms was anxiety brought on by a major life transition.

As much as I was genuinely excited to begin my professional career in a new location with new people, when I allowed myself to look closely at the life I had left behind in Boston and get in touch with what leaving meant to me, I realized I was sad. I was grieving my younger Boston self and really didn't know who my new, professional minister self was. Move to a suburb? What? Buy a house? What? Have children? What?

I'm not suggesting my experience of a big life transition is somehow a universal experience, but I do suspect that at the heart of our major life transitions there is always some amount of grief, some sadness at the loss of what came before, and it stays with us.

A book called *A General Theory of Love*, published in 2000 by the psychiatrists Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini and Richard Lannon, describes the way our relationships, particularly our very close, intimate relationships, shape us—not only our emotions and our outlook on life, but also our body chemistry, our physiology, the development of our neural pathways. When two people live together in a long-term, intimate relationship, when they share meals, leisure time, vacations, chores, money, a bed, child-rearing, etc., over time their bodies become deeply intertwined. Here's a quote:

> *The human body constantly fine-tunes many thousands of physiologic parameters—heart rate and blood pressure, body temperature, immune function, oxygen saturation, levels of sugars, hormones, salts, ions, metabolites… [But] an individual does not direct all of his own functions. [An intimate partner] transmits regulatory information that can alter hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, immune function and more.… The reciprocal process occurs simultaneously: the first person regulates the physiology of the second, even as he himself is regulated."*

This is why living when a loved-one has died isn't just emotionally painful; it physically hurts. This other body that has been regulating aspects of our physiology, this other body to which we have become habituated, is no longer present, no longer close by.

Change alone is unchanging, said the weeping philosopher. But it's also really, really hard.

I assume it's not just intimate loved ones who regulate our bodies in this way, although they may have the most impact. I assume where we live—the place we call home, our neighborhood—regulates our bodies to some degree. Where we work regulates our bodies to some degree. Our daily routine regulates our bodies to some degree. We become habituated in all sorts of ways. We become grounded in all sorts of ways.

Thus, any transition, any change that requires us to break out of our habits will bring some pain, even if it's a change we want. I was ready to leave Boston in 1999. It was the right time for a life transition. But I see it so clearly now: despite how right it seemed, my body was still wired for its patterns of life in Boston. And because I didn't know I was grieving that life, I became ill.

I assume something like this happens with any life transition. A new school means different teachers, different peers, a different pattern to the day—the old ways have to shift. You or your partner receive a life-threatening diagnosis and in the blink of an eye all routine becomes geared towards treatment; life's daily familiarities and pleasures become elusive such that even food tastes different. You lose a job—especially one that really matched your identity and sense of calling—and you must break with the habits of that job. You have a baby, and you must break with old habits. You retire, and you must break with old habits.

Aging at any time in our lives, but certainly as our bodies and our minds begin to decline, requires that we break with old habits. Or consider becoming sober: for addicts the body is utterly enmeshed with a substance, completely regulated by the need to have that substance. Getting sober is a grief-ridden process.

Change alone is unchanging, said the weeping philosopher. But it's also really, really hard. Even if we've moved on in our minds, our bodies long for the way life was.

In the midst of the grief that comes with life transitions we have spiritual resources available to us. Perhaps most importantly we have our own capacity for quieting down, becoming still, being peaceful, paying attention, breathing. When I open worship I ask my congregants to "find that place inside, that place where you may go when you long for comfort and solace, when you yearn for peace." We don't typically go there when confronted with a major life transition. We don't typically go there when the going gets tough, when we're in pain, when we've just lost our job, when we've just received the diagnosis, when the funeral director is talking to us about arrangements for a deceased loved one.

We're just as likely to be screaming or panicking, passing out or curled up on the floor in the fetal position. It takes real discipline to find a place of strength and grounding inside when your sources of strength and grounding outside have just disappeared.

In moments of life transition we need to stop and grieve for the life that is, for better or for worse, slipping away. We need times of quiet and stillness to say, think and feel whatever it is we need to say, think and feel about our old life before we can fully embrace

the new. We need times of peacefulness and paying attention in order to break well with old habits.

In her book, *Drinking: A Love Story,* Caroline Knapp writes about her experience of finding that place of quiet in community—in AA meetings:

> *When people talk about their deepest pain, a stillness often falls over the room, a hush so deep and so deeply shared it feels like reverence. That stillness keeps me coming, and it helps keep me sober, reminding me what it means to be alive…what it means to be human.*

Perhaps we can expect tears. Because in those silent, still places, where we find comfort and solace, and even joy— there we can grieve, and in grieving well we can make ourselves ready for whatever new life awaits. ■

Making Change

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Moving with Change

BY **KAT LIU**, MEMBER OF THE *QUEST* EDITORIAL TEAM, FROM HER BLOG WIZDUUM.NET

Being religiously savvy Unitarian Universalists, most of you probably know that one of the core teachings of Buddhism is impermanence. All things are conditional, and thus all things change. For example, people get older. When you're a kid this seems like a good thing. As an adult, not so much. (Young adults may not yet relate to this, but trust me, it's coming.)

You may also know that Buddhism teaches that attachment, or grasping—for example, not wanting things to change (even though all things change)—is the cause of *dukkha*, the Sanskrit word that gets translated into English as suffering, or dissatisfaction.

Knowing this, I try to not be attached. I try to accept that everything changes, including all of us. People are born. People die. And those of us in between those two events grow older with every day. So it is partly due to age (and partly due to inactivity) that my joints are far less flexible than they used to be. I've suffered frozen shoulder on both sides, limiting their range of motion, and my knees ache if I sit in half-lotus position. (Forget full-lotus.) My eyes don't focus quite as well as they used to, either.

I accept getting older with the intellectual understanding that aging is inevitable (unless you're dead), and thus there is no point in lamenting the changes that come with it. But while stoic acceptance of aging may mitigate *dukkha*, suffering, dissatisfaction, I can't say that there was any joy in that approach.

A few months ago I took a day-long workshop at East Bay Meditation Center or EBMC, in Oakland, California. I really did not know what to expect from the class, other than knowing that I admire one of the two teachers and wanted to learn from him. And he did not disappoint. But it was the other teacher, whom I did not know, whose wisdom that day was transformative.

One of EBMC's core teachings is to embody the Dharma—literally—by reminding us that we are embodied beings. So I was not surprised when this other teacher started leading us in movement meditation. But I was a bit apprehensive about whether my body would be able to move as requested.

Through the ongoing, inevitable process of change, we are continually becoming something new together.

I needn't have worried. Using language that acknowledged our various degrees of mobility in the room, she guided us to stretch and bend so far as we were able to, emphasizing that whatever we did was enough, asking us to be gentle with ourselves. She encouraged us to focus not on what our bodies couldn't do but instead on what they could and did do. And that, for me, caused a profound shift.

I realized that without being consciously aware of it I'd been thinking of my body as a machine that my mind rides around in, and machines break over time. But that way of thinking only looks at change in terms of loss, and the best you can do is to accept it.

Instead, our teacher reminded us that whoever we are is in large part due to our bodies, however they are. Through the ongoing, inevitable process of change, we are continually becoming something new together. Truly, that is cause for gratitude and celebration. ■

From Your Minister

BY **MEG RILEY**
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Here's how I wish change happened:

Change says to The Universe, *Hey, I'd like to happen now!* And The Universe replies, with ease and joy, *That's terrific! Happen, then!* And change happens, a tiny sweet bud opening to a beautiful flower.

Here's how it seems change mostly does happen:

Change says to The Universe, *Hey, I'd like to happen now!* And before The Universe can have an opinion, Resistance says, *No!* And Change says more loudly, trying to reach The Universe, *I'D LIKE TO HAPPEN NOW!* And Resistance jumps in and screams, *NO NO NO NO NO!!* And The Universe, hearing some ruckus off in the distance, says *What?* And Change says, *I AM GOING TO HAPPEN WHETHER RESISTANCE LIKES IT OR NOT.* And a drama unfolds, Change versus Resistance, with some amount of change as by-product, though not always the change that asked to happen.

It's not always like that. I mean, I love small changes. I am a person who creates and enjoys small changes just for the sake of variety. I never drive the same way when I go to familiar places. I like to try new recipes and new products. If there is an exotic fruit or vegetable I've never heard of, I'll buy it without having a clue what to do with it, just because I like its looks. By now, I've had short hair, long hair, curly hair and straight hair; brown hair, black hair, blonde hair and grey hair. And I never met furniture I couldn't rearrange in a hundred ways.

There are people who enjoy the variety that this kind of surface change brings into life, and people who loathe it. In particular, people who work or live with me have strong reactions to this tendency. At home, my propensity towards rearranging the furniture has been known to make my family scream in frustration when they try to sneak through a familiar place in the dark and suddenly run into an unmovable object that has been moved.

But for me, these small changes bring life. Moving the furniture and new hair arrangements—usually carried out on the spur of the moment and without much forethought—almost always accompany my semi-conscious process towards deeper changes. They give me something to do on the journey, because in the move towards deeper change, resistance almost always shows up and slows things down.

I am a person who creates and enjoys small changes just for the sake of variety.

Most major changes in my life have occurred over the course of years, not moments. Usually I'm on the baby step path through life. And sometimes the one step forward, two steps back path. Changes have not been accompanied by flashes of lightning or sudden enlightenment. They have been more of a slow drip, drip, drip, until the bucket overflows and dumps out and causes something large to move.

Oh sure, occasionally it's different. There are moments that stand out even years later—love at first sight; or a time when I suddenly realized something I had not known a moment earlier, and the world tilted on its axis. But mostly that's not how it works.

For me, haircuts and furniture rearrangements, new friends and new hobbies, are a way to practice the inward big changes. Getting out of ruts so that I have to be more alert—as I walk through my living room, say—gives me practice getting out of the larger, deeper ruts I can fall into, even the ones I was born into and just called reality, such as family systems, systems of oppression—beliefs of the fish-don't-know-they're-in-water type.

In the US there's been a lot of talk about change lately, and how it takes place. Many of us who want the centuries-old systems of oppression to change are tired of asking politely, tired of watching people we love be hurt or even killed. The Black Lives Matter movement is advocating disruption of business as usual, so that the disruption that racism brings into everyday life for the Black community spreads out into the wider world. Others loathe these disruptive tactics and suggest there are better ways to get things done.

Me, I am a reader of history. I see that no gain for any people has happened without friction and the escalation of conflict. I think over and over of these words from Frederick Douglass, which I first encountered in the UU hymnbook:

Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are people who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never did and it never will.

Plowing the ground, thunder and lightning, roaring oceans—sometimes I truly loathe these things and want a placid lake on a sunny day. For me, it's important to create stability when things are changing around me—to create spiritual practices and steady relationships and small creature comforts, so that I can face another day of agitation and struggle.

It's in that daily balance of urgency and resistance, the daily practice of comfort and risk, the tiny moments around the edges, that I can really know change.■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I can't claim that I'm a big fan of change. I like comfort. I like knowing what to expect. When faced with big changes in my life, particularly ones I didn't choose, my tendency is to try to find a way to make things go back to the way they were. If that doesn't work, it's possible that I might have the tiniest tendency to pout.

Which, of course, does no good whatsoever. Change, after all, is an inevitable part of life. Often it's even an excellent part of life. When you're an adult who is well into middle age, and the changes in your body are rarely in a positive direction, it's easy to forget how exciting it is as a child for your body to grow and change and gain skills.

When you are faced with change in the shape of loss—through death or disease or divorce or the many other ways things can fall apart—it can be hard to remember how exciting change can be in the form of a new job, a new friend, a new hobby.

One of the things that helps me to keep my perspective on change when things are shifting around me is to remember that it is a central part of life. And by *life* I don't just mean *the things that happen to us as we go through our days*. I mean the nature of all living things. Biology. In particular, evolution.

The central insight that helps us to understand living beings, and the ecosystems that they belong to, is that species don't necessarily stay the same over time. It isn't that God created tigers, and then there were beautiful stripy giant cats forever more. Tigers evolved from earlier ancestors, their stripes an adaptation that provided camouflage in the mixed light and shadow of their environment. There are tigers—or peacocks or pythons or people—only because species change over time to adapt to their environment. And environments also change over time, ensuring that species have to change if they are going to survive.

Which is the rocky part. All of the beautiful diversity of life on this planet is because species change over time to adapt to their environment. And all of that beautiful diversity comes because some individuals don't live long enough to pass along their genes. The whole process is messy, and works because beings die as much as because beings live and reproduce.

Change—evolution—is what keeps things from being boring and all the same. It enables new forms of life to arise, new possibilities to unfold. Change—evolution—is also a big, ugly mess. It happens because of random mutations, most of which are the exact opposite of helpful. It happens because beings die.

All of the marvels of evolution, from the sarcastic fringehead to the slow loris (look them up), only come about because generations of beings lose out to the process of change. Change is just like that. It isn't pretty. Lots of times it hurts. It always means giving something up. But without it there would be no stories.

Think about it. Change, particularly unwelcome change, is the basis of plot. Nobody wants to read a book or watch a movie in which nothing changes, nothing happens, and everyone ends up just the same at the end as they were in the beginning. People become great when they encounter great difficulty and find a way to overcome it. Stories have meaning because characters change through the events of the plot.

Poet Muriel Rukeyser notes that "The universe is made of stories, not of atoms." Which is to say that the universe is made of change and diversity and growth. I happen to believe this. I'm not convinced that the universe wants me to be happy, or that things happen for a reason. I'd like to think so, but I'm far from convinced. There's just too much pain and suffering in the world for me to assume that the whole system is designed for things to come out in some celestial version of "right."
But what I do see, across what we know of the billions of years of our universe, is that change is the fundamental principle. There was whatever there was before the Big Bang for however long it was there—an indescribable Nothing in Particular that we call the singularity. And then All of Everything exploded outwards into an ongoing process of change. Nothing in Particular turned into an amazing array of galaxies and stars and planets and living beings, each perpetually undergoing change.

> "The universe is made up of stories, not of atoms."
> —Muriel Rukeyser

It isn't easy. Sometimes it's brutal and violent as a supernova. Sometimes it's gentle and kind as a bird sheltering growing chicks. There are no guarantees that we will get what we want. But the very nature of the universe guarantees us that we will be able to live out our stories, to learn and create and reinvent ourselves as we go. If you think about it, that's a pretty amazing promise. ■

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As wave is driven by wave
And each, pursued, pursues the wave ahead,
So time flies on and follows, flies, and follows,
Always, for ever and new. What was before
Is left behind; what never was is now;
And every passing moment is renewed.

by **Ovid**, from *Metamorphoses*