

**Long Walk Part of Gift**  
Reverend Sharon K. Dittmar  
First Unitarian Church  
536 Linton Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45219  
(513) 281-1564  
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In the last month of my grandfather's life he went on a long walk for the love of his life, my grandmother. When we buried him on a gray November day, the local jeweler quietly walked up to my father and said "Chuck, your Dad picked out a Christmas gift for Helen. Do you want to see it?" Months earlier, with his heart failing, my grandfather, Carl, had gone to select a Christmas gift for his wife, Helen. He had never gone so early to purchase a Christmas gift for his wife.

On Christmas Day that year my father gave his mother his father's gift with these words "Pop picked this out for you for Christmas. He wanted you to have it." Oh, she cried. We all cried. She wore that piece of jewelry for the rest of her life. It was not the biggest gem, nor the most beautiful. But I will tell you it was the best. My grandfather knew what his death would mean to his wife, so he left her a gift for the journey. It was as far as he could go on a long walk with her, knowing she was about to take one of the longest walks of her life without him.

For whom have you given a long walk, and why? Who has given a long walk for you? The answers to these questions are complex, revealing much about love, values, character, and unrequited everything. Long walks require commitment, sacrifice, love. Long walk part of gift. *The New Testament* tells us God's long walk was his only begotten son. The story of the birth and death of Jesus is of such a monumental walk, that the possibility and power of it have brought us here this evening regardless of

theology, hoping that even if we haven't felt "Christmasy" there will still be some sort of miraculous gift.

What is the miraculous gift we seek? Some of us have been fooled into thinking it will come in the form of a fantastic, just right present – the Xbox or a diamond. If you want to search for a miraculous gift, I promise you it will not come as an item, or anything that can be bought and sold.

A gift, without the long walk, although potentially of great financial value, means very little. Money buys stuff. This we know. But it is Christmas Eve and a bunch of Unitarian Universalists would not take the time to come to church on a cold, dark evening with their friends and family if they were looking for stuff. A shopping mall is a better place to find stuff at this late hour.

Those of us gathered here are looking for gifts of a different nature, gifts told in a story about a baby in a manger – miraculous gifts of long walks yet to be. These gifts are not sold at shopping malls. They do not come in boxes. They are not sold at discount prices. These gifts come from the hands and hearts of people who give of themselves in love and sacrifice.

When Christmas has been tidied up and packed away for another year, the gifts acknowledged, many already forgotten, the New Year stretches in front of us.

What will get us through those months, with all that they may hold, will not be the things in the boxes. We must look to the hands of those who bought and wrapped and carried those gifts. With their gifts, they are telling us something too wonderful, perhaps too embarrassing, for words. They are telling us that, for us,

they will take the long walk. So when you open the box and find the chainsaw, the long underwear, the fruitcake, the pot holder, or the seashell from a distant ocean, remember that it's not just "the thought" that counts. Remember too, "long walk part of gift."

Long walks are what we give when we love. For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son. For I so love you I give a seashell from a faraway bay, my lunch, a hug, a visit to the emergency room, a ride when your car breaks down, a hand held in the hospital, money when you have none, courage when you have lost your voice, refusals of assistance when you will not get clean, frequent flyer miles, flowers, a home cooked meal, companionship, a last Christmas gift, and love, and love, and love and love and love. "In the bleak midwinter, in this world of pain, where our hearts are open love is born again."

The writer James Carroll notes that "Humans cannot have the experience that something is missing without supplying it through an unwilled act of imagination." It is our nature to find light in the darkness, and without the gift of darkness we cannot find the light we seek for the journey. Here in the darkness light is easier to find. So for example, in the darkness of recession it is easier to see the light of generosity. Generosity means more today than it did last year.

So often we, you and I, are the miraculous gifts we seek. In a time of recession and financial fear, the long walk we will take in our families and country this coming year includes calmly and joyfully giving to one another and organizations we care about in hope and faith without knowing where and how the road ends. The beauty of the long

walk is that there is no room for pettiness, vengeance, or Scrooge like stinginess. Long walks are complex as I told you, revealing much about love, values, character, and unrequited everything.

Long walks offer unparalleled and invisible beauty within the receiver and the giver, companionship, hope, compassion, and love. It was not the jewelry my grandfather bought, it was the drive to the jeweler months before he died, that lives in the jewelry he left behind. It was not the gemstone, but the long walk that made my grandmother cry, knowing that she was not alone, even after my grandfather's death. The long walks we give, not only help others, but create internal spaces of unparalleled beauty and reconciliation with all that separates each of us from a deep sense of life's great purpose and meaning. Long walk part of gift for the giver to.

Behold, I bring you good news of great joy, you are the miraculous gift you seek. This will be a sign for you: someone has already been on a long walk for you. O Holy Night, I am on my knees in wonder. In the new year to come, may each of you be the hands that carry miraculous gifts to others, and back to yourself again. I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.