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Bonita Turner
MASC student

*EDUCATING UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
MINISTERS AND
PROGRESSIVE RELIGIOUS
LEADERS SINCE 1904
A MEMBER OF
THE GRADUATE
THEOLOGICAL UNION*

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Bitter to Sweet: An Indian Odyssey

“Now I understand that mystical calls exert their own gravitational pull.”

For Starr King graduate Danielle Green ('88), a joyous trip to India to pick up her adoptive daughter exploded into a nightmare, one that would forever change her view of destiny.

In 1999, the Rev. Green, a single mother and marriage and family therapist from Sarasota, Fla., traveled to a Hyderabad orphanage with her 6-year-old daughter to meet the newest member of their family, an 8-month-old girl from the nomadic Lambada tribe.

The day Green arrived, a social worker called her hotel room and told her to leave the country immediately. A scandal had erupted involving an underground ring selling South Asian females, and Green had landed in the middle of it. Her presence became headline news.

Clerics in Hyderabad, Indian's largest predominantly Muslim city, voiced their opposition to an adoption outside the country. Hindus objected to people from a wealthy nation like the United States adopting low-caste females. In the midst of public alarm that children were being sold to international buyers to harvest organs, some believed Green was part of the criminal activity.

The situation, she said, “got huge and overwhelming.” Her life was in danger. But if she left immediately, the baby, one of 6 million abandoned girls in this vast nation, would disappear into some other orphanage like a needle in a haystack.

Green refused to give up. She sent her young daughter home with friends. Then, acting on the advice of a Catholic nun who headed another



The Rev. Danielle Green with the foundation stone she contributed for a school in India named for her daughter Annaporva.

orphanage in the city, Green appealed to the most powerful women in the land – the Gandhi widows. She camped in the office of Maneka Gandhi, wife of Indira Gandhi's deceased son Sanjay, who offered a substitute child. Green refused.

Finally, under Maneka Gandhi's protection, Green was able to find her baby.

The Catholic sister stepped in to help, secretly harboring Green and the baby in a hospital room with black-painted windows and a door bolted and locked from the outside. For three weeks Green hid as she got to know her new daughter, Annaporva, and worked on her dissertation, a study of the mystical experience of “being called” from a psychoanalytical perspective.

“What happened in that room,” Green said, “started my whole involvement in ministry in India.”

One evening the nurse who brought her food forgot to lock the door. Two men burst in and Green prepared to die. One of them opened a bag, but instead of a weapon, he pulled out a newspaper photo of Green he had blown up and framed. In careful English, he said he needed to tell her about his mystical experience.

“For this man to use the very language I had been writing about was a powerful synchronicity,” she said. “He told me God had
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Grapevine



Kathy Walker ('97) is now in her seventh year serving the Unitarian Universalist Church of Meadville in Pennsylvania. In 2004 she took a five-month sabbatical and spent part of that time learning about Chinese religions. She traveled to China twice, visiting 20 temples, most of them Buddhist, as there are few Taoist or Confucian temples left in the country.

Alan Taylor ('98) was called in 2003 as minister to Unity Temple UU Congregation in Oakpark, Ill. The church, built by noted architect Frank Lloyd Wright, is so famous it attracts 20,000 visitors a year. "There are unique challenges," he said, "in assisting the congregation to cultivate its liberal religious identity and move beyond the shadow of the building."

Addae Watson ('04) began her Ph.D. program this fall at the California continued on next page

Spiritual Environmentalism Inspires New MASC Student at Starr King

"Teaching people how to live in their environment, rather than control it, takes special training. Starr King is preparing me for that."

While solid waste management may not be a conversation starter at most parties, it's the drive behind Bonita Turner's switch from Starr King's M.Div. program to the school's new Master of Arts in Religious Leadership for Social Change.

Turner spent 18 years in the solid waste field, overseeing disposal of all the garbage generated by the good citizens of San Antonio, Texas. Over that time, her spiritual passion for the environment ran deep but often silent.

"Working in publicly-supported city government," she said, "I couldn't bring the God component into discussions. Yet I felt those conversations about God and the environment were critical."

In her first year at Starr King, Turner came to understand that neither church nor community ministry were her path. Yet she was burning to translate her spiritual environmentalism into purposeful action. The new MASC program struck her as the perfect match for her needs.

"I want to use my professional experience with my beliefs," she said. "People will respond more positively to proposed changes in our approach to the environment if the religious component is part of the discussion. As residents of the planet, we have a responsibility to examine our practices that lead to the problem of solid waste disposal."

The MASC program offers the framework to



MASC student Bonita Turner

help Turner realize her goal of working with an environmental agency in Alaska, now her home state.

"Teaching people how to live in their environment, rather than control it, takes special training," she said. "Starr King is preparing me for that. First, good leaders define reality. Last, leaders say thank you. And in between leaders become debtors, because they owe so much to the people who make change happen."

That kind of leadership training is exactly what the MASC program is all about, said Becky Leyser, SKSM's Dean of Students.

"We now offer a two-year program that follows the same tried-and-true pedagogy as the M.Div. program," she said. "It's student-centered, flexible and emphasizes building both skills and self-sufficiency."

The MASC, she said, is designed for those who want to work as religious leaders but don't need to be ordained.

"The kind of people who would be comfortable here at Starr King," Leyser said, "are those who think outside the box — self-starters drawn to challenge and innovation."

This group includes those who already work for social justice in secular or religious institutions but want to improve their skills.

"We focus on engaged spirituality with a practical twist," said Leyser. "We give students what they need to succeed out in the world, which includes being aware of your power, being intentional about your work and taking care of yourself."

Turner, along with other MASC students, will learn community organizing, media relations, non-profit management, political action and social service ministry under the guidance of Starr King faculty and a seasoned activist mentor, who'll supervise a six-month community placement.

As with all SKSM programs, MASC students can also access Graduate Theological Union and University of California, Berkeley resources to enhance their educational experience. Last year Turner attended a series of lectures sponsored by

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Lex Crane: A Unifying Life

“I’m an atheist who loves God -- the immense, evolving cosmos, which created us in the course of evolution.”

Since 1951, when the Rev. Lex Crane, 83, started his ministry, he has witnessed decades of change in the Unitarian Universalist movement. Nonetheless, an enduring thread wended through his life, stitching it into a meaningful, revealing whole. For Crane, that thread first appeared as a mystical experience when he was 8 years old and eventually led him, in his ninth decade, to establish a Unitarian Universalist organization for those who seek or have experienced the cosmos as one unified whole, with oneself as an inseparable part of it.

“I’m an atheist,” he said, “who loves God — the immense, evolving cosmos, which created us in the course of evolution.”

Crane was 29 when he entered the ministry. At that time few found their calling in middle age, and even fewer were women. Now more than half of Unitarian Universalist ministers are female.

“Women,” Crane said, “have eliminated almost entirely the competitiveness amongst men, a highly creative change.”

He also saw a move towards informality that began to take hold in the 1960s and allowed him to focus less on appearance and more on church administration. Early in his career, Crane was expected to wear robes at church and call frequently at the homes of parishioners. At that time, most in his congregation were Christians, a religious influence he also saw wane.

“Whether this cultural evolution is for better or worse,” he said, “time will tell. But it looks like it might be for better, given the declining legitimacy of mainline Christian religion. I’m one who needs a rational grasp of the nature of things, and this move away from Christianity liberates the denomination from the hold of a valuable but non-rational tradition.”

Crane, who spent six years in Catholic elementary schools, knew immediately he belonged in the ministry when he met two Unitarians while in graduate school at Johns Hopkins University. Browsing his new friends’ bookshelf, he found a Starr King School catalog, read a list of traits,



The Rev. Lex Crane, 1951 Starr King graduate.

skills and background required for ministers and realized they described him.

“I had assumed up until then that religion was a closed door to me,” he said.

He soon visited a Unitarian church and felt an immediate fit, one that has sustained him over 54 years that included leadership of 15 churches. He’s a minister emeritus of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima, Wash., and the Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara, a town where he settled after retiring in 1987.

“The ministry is an unusual way of life in a society that values, above all, the acquisition of recognition, status, wealth and power,” Crane said. “Its rewards are substantial but not much prized in society. They derive from the task of sitting still for a good part of each week, reflecting and researching the problems and possibilities of human existence in hopes of gaining insight. Then, at the end of the week, those insights are shared with bright, educated people who give instant feedback. As a minister, you become the center of a community and move with them through crises and triumphs, having a direct, immediate, steady contact.”

When Crane first started, parishioners came to his door with a wide range of prob-

Lex Crane continued on page 5

Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), where she’ll focus on Philosophy and Religion, with an emphasis in Women’s Spirituality.

The Revs. Margaret (‘76) and Fred (‘71) Keip served as co-ministers in Monterey, Calif., for 25 years, retiring in 1996. Since then, Margaret has served five congregations as interim minister and Fred has worked as a chaplain and searcher for the Josephine County Search and Rescue Team in Grant’s Pass, Ore.

After 15 years with the UU Fellowship of San Dieguito in Solano Beach, Calif., and service at several churches as interim minister, the Rev. Anne Hines (‘82) moved to Emerson UU Church in Canoga Park, Calif., a couple of years ago. She helped found the Valley Interfaith Network for Peace and Justice that has held weekly vigils since the start of the Iraq war.

The Rev. Jacqueline Luck (‘03) is planning a 2006 centennial celebration for Our Home UU Church in Ellisville, Miss. She also serves the UU Church of Jackson, 90 miles away.

Bitter to Sweet, continued...

spoken to him through my photo and said that if he named his church after me, it would prosper. And that only a woman of God would love an unknown child of the lowest caste enough to wage a public battle in the face of oppression.”

Green soon realized the man represented a conservative Christian doctrine, like the one she painfully abandoned as a young college student, along with a childhood calling to missionary work in India. Name your church after someone more appropriate to your views, she urged, like evangelists Billy Graham or Oral Roberts.

“Ultimately,” Green said, “the man told me this matter was between himself and God. While he wanted my blessing, he had to follow his call.”

She finally agreed, with the understanding that she would interview him for her dissertation.

Nine months later, after a long legal battle that went all the way to the Indian Supreme Court, Green brought Annaporva home.

The Green Ministry now numbers six churches and a seminary, where young Indians are ordained to preach and work on social service projects — one a new primary school for Lambada children. In the following years, Green traveled to India several times to preach at seminary services and graduation ceremonies.

Then, in December 2004, the tsunami hit. Although India’s southeast coast, its worst affected area, was a four-and-a-half hour drive from the Lambada tribal region, where Green had focused her efforts, she knew she was in a position to help.

“By this point,” she said, “I’d come to terms psychologically and religiously with my Green Ministry relationship. Without my years at Starr King, which allowed me to trust my capacity to bridge faith differences, I would’ve adamantly refused to participate because this ministry brought up too much dogma from my Pentecostal and Baptist childhood. Instead, I was challenged to understand and speak to a larger worldview.”

From thousands of miles away, Green started work on setting up counseling services for two villages devastated by massive waves that swept away families, homes and livelihoods.

First, she connected with MAPS, an international humanitarian relief organization and adoption agency in Maine, which agreed to administer a program at no cost and put her in touch with social workers in India. Then she traveled to Pune, near Mumbai, and met with



Danielle Green and her daughters.

a social worker who organized her staff and board of trustees to volunteer for a nine-month commitment to provide trauma services for the two villages. A team of two psychiatrists and several social workers met with every village family to assess needs. They traveled across India monthly to dispense medications and provide grief counseling for people suffering almost unimaginable loss and post traumatic stress.

MAPS’ fundraising efforts have also focused on expanding an orphanage overflowing with children and buying replacement boats for villagers who’ve fished Indian coastal waters over generations. One \$3,500 boat can support seven families (<http://www.mapsadopt.org/tsunamiaid.html>).

“What I see now,” Green said, “is exactly what I witnessed in the mystical vision of my childhood. I had said no to that vision. Now I understand that mystical calls exert their own gravitational pull and are manifested beyond the individual’s will. After all the difficulties adopting my daughter, I have this love affair with India. As it says in the Bagavadgita, that which is bitter becomes so sweet.”

MASC, continued...

TREES (Theological Round Table on Ecological Ethics and Spirituality), a GTU-affiliated organization, that helped solidify her desire to work in waste management.

“At Starr King,” Turner said, “I’m learning how to use my deep religious beliefs to work together to maintain and improve our environment.”

MASC application deadlines: Dec. 1, Feb. 1 and March 1. For more information about the program, visit www.sksm.edu or contact admissions@sksm.edu.

New faces lead classes at Starr King this year, bringing energy and expertise to self-directed student learning, a hallmark of the school’s educational philosophy. Among new faculty are --



Rev. Dr. Gabriella Lettini

Reinhardt Director of Studies in Public Ministry and Associate Professor of Theological Ethics



Rev. Dr. David Sammons

Visiting Professor of Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage



Rev. Alma Crawford
Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship

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Donor Invests in SKSM's "Extraordinary" Students



Rigdon Currie, Starr King supporter.

"The proof is in the pudding," said Rigdon Currie, a longtime Starr King supporter who made the school the beneficiary of a \$250,000 trust this past summer. "I've been involved with Starr King over 15 years. I know a lot of grads, and with very few exceptions they're extraordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things."

Currie and Patricia Johnson planned for the trusts over several years, intending the money as a legacy when they're gone. In July they notified the Rev. Kelly Flood, SKSM Vice President for Advancement, of their financial commitment.

"Rigdon and Patricia," said Flood, "are generous people who want to see effective, dynamic leaders working for a better tomorrow for their children and grandchildren. Starr King School's mission is just that -- to prepare progressive religious leaders who bring justice and joy into the world."

A former Xerox executive and venture capital-

Lex Crane, continued...

lems, as they still do in churches across the country. Now, he said, they're more likely to ask for counseling to cope with what he sees as the greatly increased stress of life in America, one too full of stimulation and activity, one lacking in meaning.

"That loss of meaning," he said, "moves people from professions like law and academia to Unitarian Universalist ministry, where they see the promise of a more meaningful way of life."

These days Crane's own meaning comes from what he calls "rational mysticism," which rejects most Westerners' cultural attachment to only one valid worldview, whether based on religion or science.

"Regretably," he said, "that generates endless conflict among humans. People must look at the world sometimes with rational spectacles and some-

ist, Currie, 75, appreciates what he sees as the "entrepreneurial" spirit of SKSM students.

"Starr King attracts people who've been out in the hard, cruel world and have sorted things out about what they want to do," he said. "These are people who think for themselves, so tend to be more effective over the long pull. They want to give something back in a Unitarian Universalist context. The trusts we've set up are a highly leveraged investment, putting givers, rather than takers, out into society."

According to Currie, Starr King's emphasis on student-centered learning allows seminarians to determine their own educational agenda, an often difficult process, but one that allows them to understand who they are.

"I can't see myself going through that crucible," Currie said, "so I admire people who can."

Instead he chooses to support Starr King students both as a donor – he's a member of the President's Circle, a group that pledges over \$1,000 to the school every year – and as chair of SKSM's Leadership Council, which is leading Starr King's Centennial Campaign. He and Johnson have contributed over \$300,000 to the Centennial Campaign, scheduled to wrap up in May 2006.

"Thanks to people like Rigdon and Patricia," said Flood, "we've passed the \$6 million mark towards our \$7 million campaign goal."

For more information about how to support Starr King School, contact the Rev. Kelly Flood, Vice President for Advancement at kflood@sksm.edu.

times with mystical ones. In practice, almost everyone creates a world view with elements of both in order to do justice to the complex reality in which we find ourselves."

In the past year, Crane helped organize the North American "Unitarian Universalist Mystics in Community" (www.uumystics.org). SKSM graduates Ken Collier ('79) and Barbara Pescan ('81) sit on the board, among graduates from other seminaries. The group brings together Unitarian Universalist mystics for mutual support in their "quest for direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life."

"The cosmos," Crane said, "is our creator."

2005 Honorary Doctorates

Starr King School awarded honorary doctorate degrees to the Rev. David Sammons, the Rev. Glenn Turner and Arliss Ungar, a longtime volunteer, at May commencement ceremonies in San Francisco.

Sammons is a 1965 SKSM grad who has led the Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church in Walnut Creek, Calif., for more than two decades. He has mentored dozens of Starr King interns and served on the school's board of trustees. This year he's teaching at SKSM as the Visiting Professor of Unitarian Universalist Ministry and Heritage.

Turner, a 1962 SKSM grad, is a small-group ministry advocate and former UUA Northeast District executive.

Ungar is a Starr King volunteer with 30 years of service. She's currently writing a history of the school and chairing the Balazs Committee, which annually sponsors a Transylvanian minister for a year of study at Starr King.

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