

## March 3 International Women's Day Service at First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

**Week before the service:** Congregants were asked via the electronic newsletter to ponder strong resilient women in their life, share phrases on board at church building and watch the [\*Should I have a daughter . .\*](#) from the TED talk by Sarah Kay

Service by Kye Flannery, intern minister, plus a working committee Margaret, Katrin, Melanie, Sina, N'kem

**Opening Words:** Worship Associate (WA)

**Chalice Lighting and Song**

**Welcome and Greeting**

**What to expect:** A group came together, discussed women's roles and collaborated; thus this is service about strong resilient women. Different from usual service: Four speakers not 1 sermon; collaborative spoken word project with congregational input.

**Hymn:** 168 "One More Step"

**Time for All Ages:** "The Paper Bag Princess"

**Musical & Spoken Word Meditation:** Woman am I by Joan Szymko

Blessed be my brain, that I may conceive of my own colour;

Blessed be my breast, that I may give sustenance to those I love.;

Blessed be my womb, that I may create what I choose to create;

Blessed be my knees so that I may bend but not break,

Blessed be my feet that I may walk on the path of my enlightened self.

**Silent Meditation:**

**Joys and Sorrows:**

**Speaker 1:** Strong resilient women in my life N'kem (am) Melanie (pm)

**Offering and Anthem**

"Breaths" 1001 Teal hymnal

**Speaker 2:** Strong resilient women in my life Phyllis

**Hymn:** We are . . . 1051

**Speaker 3:** Strong resilient women in my life John (am),

**Sharing Activity & Preparation for Spoken word:**

Get congregational words and phrases about strong resilient women and record on flip chart; start & end with We are One Woman (from the UN Women song for 2013)

**Speaker 4** Strong resilient women in my life (5 minutes) Sina

**RECOGNIZING OUR GUESTS & BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Spoken Benediction:** Read back the spoken word collaboration to the congregation (following)

Used the words to UN Women's song as a responsive reading.

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One Woman released Mar 8 2012 by U.N. Women

**Leader:**In Kigali, she wakes up,  
She makes a choice,  
In Hanoi, Natal, Ramallah.  
In Tangier, she takes a breath,  
Lifts up her voice,  
In Lahore, La Paz, Kampala.  
Though she's half a world away  
Something in me wants to say ...

**All:** We are One Woman, You cry and I hear you.  
We are One Woman, You hurt, and I hurt, too.  
We are One Woman, Your hopes are mine.  
We shall shine.

**Leader** In Juarez she speaks the truth,  
She reaches out,  
Then teaches others how to.  
In Jaipur, she gives her name,  
She lives without shame  
In Manila, Salta, Embu.  
Though we're different as can be,  
We're connected, she with me

### Sung benediction: Spirit of Life

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**Here's the group poem** we wrote in this morning's service, honoring the strong and resilient women in our lives. Thank you for helping to create this! Kye Flannery - ministerial intern

We are One Woman:  
Encouraging and supportive  
teacher,  
share your truth --  
my mum, the artist --  
patient and forgiving,  
courage to face dark demons,  
caring and strong.  
She made enemies.  
Women in the workforce, independent --  
A pied piper,  
she is my grandmother--  
highly insightful  
persistent, always learning --

**Women:** We are One Woman, Your courage keeps me  
strong.  
We are One Woman, You sing, I sing along.  
We are One Woman, Your dreams are mine.  
And we shall shine. We shall shine.

**Men:**And one man, he hears her voice.  
And one man, he fights her fight.  
Day by day, he lets go the old ways,  
One Woman at a time.  
Though she's half a world away,  
Something in me wants to say.

**All:** We are One Woman,Your victories lift us all.  
We are One Woman,You rise and I stand tall.  
We are One Woman,Your world is mine  
And we shall shine. Shine, shine, shine.  
We shall shine Shine, shine, shine.  
We shall shine. Shine, shine, shine.

passionate, courageous, innovative.  
Marry a strong woman and be happy!  
She is a coach,  
transgender, which is shorthand for "true to  
herself,"  
oozing creativity --  
she travels an unfamiliar new way with grace.  
Bravely compassionate  
single mom who sacrifices.  
Lullabye singer  
becoming whole.  
Warm and welcoming,  
We are One Woman.

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We are one woman.  
Kindness and laughter  
a world-traveler  
loved me fiercely!  
Encouragement to grow,  
sharing passion,  
daring and caring,  
physical and mental strength.  
compassionate and dedicated to her values:

Living well! Living for Justice!  
Why not?  
Laughed her way through 98 years.  
Makes me happy!  
Music and song, strong and independent.  
Open and continually evolving, so damn brave!  
She held it all together...  
We are One Woman.

### **Speaker 1**

I am grateful to have been asked to honour my mother as part of this International Women's Day service.

My mother was born Barbara Jean Loppie in 1939 Halifax to a Black mother and aboriginal (Blackfoot-MicMac) father. Her parents passed by age 6 so she was adopted by her grandfather and raised by a village of cousins, aunts and uncles. Yes... she lived in poverty – but she was surrounded by love. Work opportunities were scarce but she was trained to be a neighbourhood nurse. There were very clear racial divides in these times but threats of violence and burning crosses couldn't crush her desire to strive.

She married young and had four children. And with them on her hip, she eventually fled an abusive marriage. One day, she learned of a program at Dalhousie University that offered free post-secondary education for minority students. And she leapt to it. Among her many jobs throughout her Dalhousie years, she worked in hospitals, prisons and group homes, and even started a group home of her own – all while raising four young ones. Years later, she left Dal with two Masters degrees in the fields of social work and education, and she even started working on a third one later in her life. She became an English-as a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher, guidance counsellor, social worker and mentor.

My mother raised me - her fifth child - as a single parent. She was both my mother and father - and we were inseparable. The school where she taught was a few blocks from mine so I'd spend a lot of time in her classroom after school, marking papers, with her girls group or sitting in the back of the adult literacy class she taught every Tuesday.

Spending so much time with her, I saw that my mother had a gift for forming deep rapport with others. I saw that she could inspire people to turn their lives around. Her passion though was working with youth. She managed to reach the core of the "delinquents" from whom love and patience were withheld, seeing clearly that these strong kids that overcame seemingly insurmountable circumstances held much hope, promise and wisdom... if provided with opportunity and nurturing instead of neglect or pity. As with beloved aunt, these kids time and time again would strive to make her proud pursue post-secondary education and flourish professionally.

She was proud of her ESL curriculum, which included cultural studies and wellness modules. She counselled her foreign students and even started a girls club at her school to help them shape positive self-images and encourage the healing of their traumas (most fervently in cases of abuse, of female circumcision/genital mutilation and post-traumatic stress). She hugged her students often. She quickly became known in our community for her joyfulness. You could tell she was in the school's hallways by following the sound of her signature, high-pitch laugh. Literally... her hearty laugh would echo through the hallways. She held assemblies to educate the student body on the richness of Canadian Black history and the journey of the civil rights movement. She made it a priority to help her kids and their families get the resources and social services they required. She did this for over 20 years and made it her life's purpose to embody compassion.

My mother passed in 1998 when I was 18 and her students still recognize me, ask if I am Mrs. Loppie's daughter, and hug me as they express their love for her. Yes, love. Because that is what people remember. That... and her signature, sing-songy laugh. She was a woman of unmovable faith and continues to be the best example of compassionate, conscientious living that I ever could ask for. Her motto was "what doesn't kill me only makes me stronger" and trust me she meant it.

Although we only had 18 years together, she succeeded in teaching me – as the Jewish proverb goes – not to ask for a lighter burden, but for broader shoulders. She taught me about independence, heart intelligence and intuition, the importance of education, the power of faith - in a higher power and in our human family, the toxicity of malice, how to stand proud as a woman of color, and how to stay true to myself in our dominator culture. Most importantly, she taught me to rise above any feelings of victimhood and to pursue my own truth shamelessly.

It really is only now in my 30s that I can fully appreciate exactly what she achieved while on this earth and her lasting influence continues to inform every decision that I make.

Thank you.

### **Speaker 3 STRONG WOMEN**

At the age of 5 as a result of war I lived in my grandparents house with my mother and her family. It was a large family, my mother had five sisters and a brother. It was a large 7 bedroomed house. My grandfather was an invalid who never left his room. He and I mostly were the only males in the

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house. Various aunts and an older female cousin lived there. Within 200 yards in their own houses lived three more aunts and their daughters. It was tight family cluster. I was low in the pecking order.

The age from 5 to 16 is impressionable. By that youthful experience I am conditioned to think of women as strong, all of them. Much stronger than me.

Ann and I have three daughters. This has added to the impression. Nothing changes.

I selected someone to introduce to you known to a large circle of my father's side of the family across 3 generations. She was called "Auntie" by all of them. To be precise, Mrs Ethel Whittingham, my great great aunt. She was, and remains in my mind, a Very Strong Woman, a tower of strength in my father's family. She was a widow who had no children of her own. She died 50 years ago just before her 100th birthday.

The name "Auntie" came from the fact that she was the aunt of the offspring of her many sisters. They were a fertile lot and there were many nephews and nieces; so many by the time I was on the scene that I never have been able to sort them out in my mind. In some of these families there was a serious lack of resources, in others there were too many children to be cared for by their parents so "Auntie" gave shelter and support. She raised some of them. My paternal grandmother, her niece, was one such, as in his turn was my father. She raised them both from infancy to adulthood. At that time it was not uncommon in rural and urban settings for children of large families to be raised by other family members.

I spent quite a lot of time with her, to escape some of the blitz in London and for school holidays. Her house was always busy. I can remember that there always seemed to be extra people, not all relatives, who came for meals. They were always welcomed and there always seemed to be enough food. The kitchen was where all gathered, the nerve centre where jobs were handed out and meals consumed. It was expected that everyone would help with whatever the day required. Auntie ruled.

Probably nearly all families have had someone in this sort of role at some time, the linchpin, holding everything together. I call her, 'the Universal Aunt'. She was not a soft touch. I do not remember hugs. She had a sharp tongue. She expected everyone to work. She cajoled, encouraged, supported, shared pieces of her mind when necessary, she was firm. She was generous but not open handed. She had strong views on most subjects. And she could laugh.

She provided for a WWI veteran, a broken man who chopped kindling and did a bit of gardening. He came every morning and mostly sat in the garage and smoked a pipe - Bert, fed and watered by Auntie. She gave away a lot of her garden produce. I delivered some of it.

She was loved by many but I cannot say by all. Some fell short of her expectations of them and doubtless she let them know. Some of those she helped subsequently prospered and forgot or resented what she had done for them. Perhaps they misunderstood her motives, if indeed she had motives other than simply to help.

I have many fond memories of the times I spent with her and my advancing years have helped me to understand what she did for a large section of my family and her immediate community, and for me personally. I am particularly grateful for this opportunity to look back and to recover my feeling for her. No statue, not known outside her circle, now largely forgotten, but nevertheless in my experience an ordinary Very Strong Woman worth celebrating. The salt of the earth. And the many like her. I wish I had said 'ThankYou' to her when I had the chance.

Nowadays this kind of big family is very rare. Families tend to be smaller and more scattered. But the Strong Women soldier on. They are still vital linchpins in many walks of life. Keeping the wheels on, picking up the pieces of misfortune in different settings and putting people back on their feet. Think back in your own experience. Look around. See the unsung heroines of the real world. We cannot do without them.

They should be recognised and thanked.