

Before and After: Pivot Points in Our Lives

Adapted from Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull of First Parish UU Cohasset, MA

Chalice lighting & Opening words

(Take a moment to breathe and center. Leave aside the thoughts and worries that distract you.)

Come into this circle of hope, holiness, and health.

Come into this sanctuary of sharing.

Come in and feel secure and comfortable.

Come in, knowing that you will be able to explore and learn and discover.

Come in, knowing that you will be heard and will be able to hear.

Check-in: How are you right now?

Reading

No, this isn't about weighing 300 pounds and losing 150. It's about pivot points of a different sort. That is, before X happened life was such and such. After X happened, life was never the same, with "never the same" being not necessarily good or bad, just never the same.

We often mark the two or three most pivotal points of our lives as crises. Always these crises are personal, though sometimes they touch vast numbers of people, like the events of 9/11, or the January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti, or the current pandemic.

For Jerry White, who grew up in Cohasset, it was personal and communal. In *I Will Not Be Broken*, Jerry wrote about what it took and what he counsels to overcome a life crisis, his own transformative "before and after." He speaks of being a survivor. As the cofounder of Survivor Corps, Jerry has spoken at the United Nations and before Congress and has written eloquently "to help survivors heal and get on with their lives." What was his "before and after?" In his book, *I Will Not Be Broken*, he wrote that on April 12, 1984 at the age of 20,

"I stepped on a landmine during a camping trip in Israel. Physically, it took a part of my leg. But it also divided my life in two—everything became either *before* or *after* the accident. It also taught me important things about resilience and coping that would later be the impetus for my work with survivors. I learned to walk on a fake leg, and then how to live and be happy despite the horror of that minefield. I returned to school, got married, had children, and worked hard to support my family."

During a trip to Cambodia 12 years later, Jerry met amputees galore. A little girl hopped up to him on a "homemade crutch," pointed at his expensive "fake leg" and looking up at him with a broad smile said, "You are one of us." Jerry began to build the Landmine Survivors Network, an effort "to ban the use of landmines and help survivors get legs and find work." Jerry's "after" was marked by growth and renewal. His life was never the same.

(Jerry White, *I Will Not Be Broken: 5 Steps to Overcoming a Life Crisis*, St. Martin's Press, NY, 2008)

Focus

What event was a "before and after" in your life? Why was this such a pivotal event for you? Did it happen only to you or do you share this "before and after" with many others? How do you feel about it?

Likes and Wishes: What did you like in this session and what are your wishes on the topic?

Closing and Extinguishing the Chalice

Go knowing that we are glad that you survived.

Go knowing that we are grateful for what you learned.

Go knowing that we celebrate the wisdom you have gleaned
and the moments of joy that life still serves up for us all.