**Let’s Dream Together**

**I have a dream, that one day the sun will rise on a better world.
I have a dream that one day peace will be the main headline of every newspaper in the world.
I have a dream that one day people will start caring for what nature gave us.
I have a dream that your dreams and my dreams will come true.**

**Chris, Grade 6**

***Hitch your wagon to a star* was the advice of the illustrious Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his great essay “Self-Reliance,” the sage of Concord encouraged generations of Americans to defy convention, to chart their own destiny, to resist the good models and put more faith in their own inspiration more than in the creeds or catechisms of ancient authorities. “Trust yourself! Every heart vibrates to that iron string.” Yet even Mister Emerson had limits, and while he may have counseled shooting for the stars, even he might have balked at strapping a lawn chair to a helium-filled weather balloon.**

**That feat awaited the advent of another visionary known as Lawn Chair Larry. According to the Darwin Awards, an honorary society which exists to commemorate those brave and half-witted individuals who improve the gene pool by removing themselves from it, Larry Walter’s boyhood dream was flying.**

**But it was not an easy path. He joined the Air Force, but his vision wasn’t good enough to qualify him as a pilot. He left the military, disappointed, wistfully watching the jets fly over his house in LA.**

**“He hatched his weather balloon scheme while sitting outside in his ‘extremely comfortable’ Sears lawn chair. Using a forged requisition request from the company where he worked, he and his girlfriend Carol purchased 45 weather balloons, tied them to his tethered lawn chair (dubbed the Inspiration I) and filled the four-foot diameter balloons with helium. Then, armed with some sandwiches, Miller Lite, a parachute and a pellet gun, Larry strapped himself into his lawn chair. He figured he would shoot to pop a few of the many balloons when it was time to descend.”**

**The plan was to cast off and rise to an altitude of around thirty feet where he could enjoy a snack while floating leisurely above his own backyard. But fate had other plans.**

**When his buddies cut the anchor line securing the lawn chair to his Jeep, Larry shot skyward as though riding a rocket, buoyed by each of the balloons holding 33 cubic feet of helium.**

**Instead of ascending to the anticipated thirty feet, he shot one mile, two miles, three miles into the air, finally leveling off at 16,000 feet. At that height he couldn’t even see his own yard, much less risk popping any of the balloons, which could destabilize his perch.**

**Instead, he simply hovered, now far too cold and scared to enjoy the king of beers, drifting at the mercy of the winds for more than fourteen hours. Larry was finally blown into the approach corridor for the Los Angeles airport, where disbelieving TWA and Delta Airlines pilots radioed in reports of their peculiar sightings.**

**“Eventually Larry gathered the nerve to shoot a few balloons, and slowly descended. The hanging tethers tangled and caught in a power line, blacking out a Long Beach neighborhood for 20 minutes. Larry climbed to safety, where he was arrested by waiting members of the LAPD. Charged with improperly operating a civil aircraft, Larry had an airtight defense: he wasn’t operating an aircraft at all. As he was led away in handcuffs, a reporter asked him why he had done it. Larry replied nonchalantly, "A man can't just sit around." [Reference: http://www.darwinawards.com/stupid/stupid1998- 11.html}**

**True enough. You can’t just sit around. As Emerson put it, ―”Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to earn it.” Aspiration plus perspiration equals progress. Success comes to those who dare. Imitation is suicide, he said. I don’t think Ralph Waldo would have minded the apparent eccentricity of sending patio furniture three miles into the air.**

**If he were here today, as we come together to create a vision for the Unitarian Congregation of Taos, I think he might say that it’s more important to let your imagination soar than to settle for what’s easy or conventional. Let your dreams take flight. Don’t tether yourself to any furniture that’s going to keep you tied down to what’s drab or boring or that stifles your inclination to be bold and live large.**

**Question laws when they’re bad laws, he’d say, even the laws of gravity. Bend the rules from time to time, because you were not born to be subservient to the rules but the rules were made to be serve you.**

**And don’t be afraid to look foolish, I think he’d add. Don’t worry if the world calls you mad or reckless. But don’t be an idiot for no reason. Rather, be a fool for something grand that stirs the soul or warms the blood. Be a fool for love. Be a fool for goodness. Be a fool for justice. Because being foolish isn’t the opposite of being wise. It’s the opposite of being cynical or jaded.**

**Don’t be afraid to be called ridiculous or naïve, he would counsel us, because all the great reformers were called ridiculous and naïve before they were called saints and moral prophets.**

**And I think he would say, don’t bother with this church unless it helps you fly, unless it lifts you above the quotidian and mundane and affords you at least occasional glimpses of how life might be lived on a higher plane. Don’t come on Sunday or call yourself a Unitarian Universalist because this church is feeding the hungry or speaking up for reproductive freedom or giving dignity to lesbians and gays, although all of those things may be true. Rather, be a part of this congregation because it affirms your values and resonates with your own higher good. Do it because your natural inclination– like a blade of grass, or a warm breeze, or the sun on a dawning day-- is upward.**

**Admittedly, we all have dreams that never get off the ground. Our best intentions sometimes flop. We can all commiserate with Lawn Chair Larry. Mistakes happen. Disappointment is the norm. Frustrations are to be expected in any great undertaking. But low aim, not shooting for the heights, is what constitutes the real failure. Staying grounded may be good for the body, but the mind was meant to ascend. For every step in the rise of civilization had its origin in an impossible dream, from abolition to suffrage to marriage equality. And when we dream together, our shared aspirations become the updraft of history that lifts us toward our goals, that makes our prayers go airborne, giving flight to our common hopes.**

**Tolerance and reason; freedom and fair play; the sanctity of conscience, the dignity of every person, a world where resources are stewarded and shared. These principles form the constellation of our faith. In a world where issues are complex, where quick solutions have a way of becoming tomorrow’s problems, where human variety means we’ll never be able to all agree on a single path, these are our UUPS, our Unitarian-Universalist Positioning-System, our spiritual navigational beacons. If you can find better or brighter stars, steer by them. Personally, I’m hitching my wagon here.**