

**THIS I BELIEVE**  
**By Maxine Barkan**  
**Wildflower Church**  
**Sunday, September 28, 2008**

There are two general attitudes in our household: the True Believer and the Skeptic. Mark, my husband, is a True Believer. I am a Skeptic. I think I was born that way. I remember when I was nine years old, I said to myself, “ I don’t believe in God.” I haven’t a clue why I came to this earth shattering decision. I went to Sunday School, I was taught the Bible, but I guess my innate skepticism reared its head.

Or, maybe it was because I could not see, hear, touch, or talk to whomever or whatever God was supposed to be. I tend to be a pragmatist and must have started at an early age. You’d think I was born in the Show Me State of Missouri, but I am a Midwesterner from Ohio and we like things to be empirically clear, too. I also found I could not accept the notion that I was supposed to fear God. If God is merciful, why do I have to fear him? There was no question that God was a he.

For me, belief is evolutionary. I don’t think there is a belief for all time. I am fond of saying I absolutely do not believe in absolutes. Which is why I am a Unitarian Universalist. The dinner table at our house when I was growing up was the time we four kids argued politics, social issues, and the state of the world with our father. I don’t remember that theological issues ever came up. I was firm in my beliefs and thought my father was a troglodyte.

Later, in the course of living, I began to modify my thinking and realized all is not black and white but many shades of gray. Perhaps I am a flip flopper, but I do not criticize the candidates running for elective offices when they change direction because of circumstances that may have changed when they first stated their beliefs. Whether I agree with them or not is not an issue. Certainly I have changed my mind about ideas and positions I once held dear as I changed and as circumstances changed. I’d hate to think I was rooted in past views because then I might be the troglodyte I accused my father of being. I would not

like to criticize those who have changed views over time including candidates for public office.

One test of my belief system came when I was hospitalized for two months after a near fatal automobile accident when driving to work. My immediate reaction was to believe that I was going to survive the ordeal, that it was up to me and to me only to make it happen. My doctors told me my positive attitude made my recovery go more smoothly and faster. I recognize that there are circumstances that cannot be altered, but I believe it is the way these circumstances are approached that makes a difference.

Over the years as I matured, I began to realize the need for a religious home, not to exchange views of theological beliefs but to be in harmony with others who were going through the same metamorphoses in their way and I was and still am in mine.

I do have an affinity for symbols. I am not a Christian, but I have a small collection of crosses, mostly Mexican, small framed pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe, old wood carved figurines of Jesus, Sts. Francis and Anthony, figurines and hangings of the Buddha, Anubis, Shiva, ancient Cycladic statuettes, and others in our house. To me they symbolize our humanity, the goodness, and the frailties of the human spirit. These are attributes in which I believe.

I have never thought of myself an atheist. To me, it is a fundamentalist point of view just as dogmatic as the fundamentalist orthodoxy on the opposite side. From my point of view, neither leaves any room for questions, doubt, or growth. I used to think I was an agnostic, but I really don't know that that means so I gave it up.

I am not concerned whether or not there is a deity or a wisp of something out there. I do think there are things we do not know and will never know but I do not find this worrisome. Answers are not always readily available. I also think we can aspire to something beyond ourselves while we do our best in the here and now.

I do have faith. I have faith in my family, my church, my community, and my country. I have faith in the goodness of most people. I understand in my faith that no one is perfect but then, neither am I.