

Sacred Ground for a Myriad of Reasons. Farewell.

By Debbie Smudski Chaim

My/our gratitude abounds for the embracing care this living space provided for our family.

First and foremost, would be the comfort level achieved, for our father/Grandfather was the proud minister of the community, the loving caretaker of the building, its grounds and fellowship.

The word FIRST is apt here for many official and emotional reasons, for as there were numerous ministers/leaders/nurturers to follow, it was he that embraced this space upon its fruition.

First Unitarian Society of Hastings /of Westchester

Our family treated this location as if a second home. For Bob Smudski, probably in thinking back, it was his first home. The hours he spent in place were many. Our children grew in this building till time of transitioning to Temple Emanuel to enact the age-old family tradition of Bar Mitzvahs, and our daughter grew beyond the gentle pull of Youth Group. Sunday mornings were as much a part of our routine as school was on weekdays, but the other fun adventures were the occasions we would simply drive over on off times to hunt for salamanders under the building and near-by stream.

My father's golf balls, long after he had moved on to the Orlando, Florida congregation, still prized findings amongst the rushes of the back property for his grandchildren, for when not musing over sermons, he practiced his 'swing' on the grounds.

The floods then too were an issue, a rowboat was once used to rescue my father as he wrote and read long into the deluge and lost track of time (and mounting

waters). But the land was so giving and responsive, so beautiful to gaze upon during services on sunny, snowy, or rainy days. It was a theater upon which our ever-changing world was exhibited. The community within and upon this land so strongly knit together.

Devoted people toiled to keep the meeting place intact from its very origins! Those names come readily to mind but I'll not mention them for there are many, and not one outweighs another in importance. Some are still amongst the current congregation (I see this, for I've once again been receiving newsletters in a far more modern format than the old, mimeographed pastel colored paper I helped generate monthly).

Even further back, I have rushing memories of my mother composing the 'church' newsletter on our parish house spacious stairway landing, where sat a desk with an old black typewriter. Back then there was a delightfully charming little white clapboard church. It was my sister and I that felt the all-embracing comfort as children of that First Unitarian Church, now far behind us.

We went by that moniker back then, Church. My mind thinks of it always as such, though I believe I was a very agreeable trustee when we were voted into 'Society' status while on Jackson Avenue.

I digress.

I mentally bid a very fond farewell to the old Jackson Avenue building, the exciting Clark Thompson designed addition, my father's beloved study, as well as to the back rooms, where my children all played, learned, and formed foundations in Sunday School.

These grounds will always, in our minds, remain as a space of bonding, nurturing and happiness.