Love Wins!

It was an inspirational Easter Sunday with an uplifting sermon and spectacular music! From the choir to the deacons to the Boy Scouts to the staff, many people contributed to make it a truly joyful celebration. Thank you all!

Photos courtesy of the Rev. Sarah Averette-Phillips and Tricia Aynes
Palm Sunday photos

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
This is my last article as your Senior Pastor. Thirteen years moved very quickly, and the time has come to say, “Good-bye.”

I enumerated many of the reasons I have loved being a part of this church community in the last issue—sharing worship, being away with the youth at a service project in Utah, Confirmation classes, travel, distinguished speakers, new programs, small groups, an engaged staff, great leadership, our new facility, and the many opportunities to be brought closer together in this vital church.

Hardest of all for Carl and me will be having to be intentional in how we distance ourselves so that the church can look to new leadership and a fresh outlook for your future, and so that the two of us can also start to focus on what is next for us. I will especially miss looking across the room and hearing Carl sing a solo on Sunday morning or on Christmas Eve. He has been an incredible source of support to me, and our “Sunday in Review” after church is finished will leave a gap to be filled. Emotions are high right now. We love you all.

It is important that I don’t stay attuned to what is about to happen, because I might form an opinion, and then feel the desire to share that opinion. I walked with you through May of 2019. IUCC is about to go on a new walk, and that direction is not my business. I trust that you will make good decisions based on what I know about this community.

Conversely: Things happen. A tragedy strikes. There is a death in the family, and I am one of the people who can speak to the situation. If something like this occurs, please, PLEASE go directly to your Interim Pastor to see if I should be contacted by the office. It is important that this process is followed for the sake of my relationship to the Interim (and the new Called Pastor). Of course, I would love to be there for you. And, protocol is important.

While we will cherish our personal friendships in the congregation, we will be removing ourselves from IUCC’s social media, including our own Facebook presence with the community. At least, for now. We won’t be planning any surprise visits in the future, but we do look forward to the day when we are invited back for a special occasion with visits to follow—after you are settled in with that special new pastor out there who is just waiting to be found.

This isn’t forever! Just consider us to be on a few long trips, which will probably be true!

Please come to church these last few Sundays. My last Communion with you is this Sunday, May 5. I have asked my friend, the Rev. Dr. Bil Aulenbach, to be a co-celebrant and Worship Leader.

My last sermon will be Sunday, May 12, and the big “send-off” is May 19. I will be looking for you in this short time left that I have the privilege of being your pastor. A church that knows who it is and why it exists, will find the means to be the church God is calling you to be.

With Love and Affection,

Pastor Paul
Pastor Sarah’s Ordination was a warm and poignant event!

Congregants, fellow clergy, and family gathered for a beautiful ceremony on April 14th to celebrate the ordination of the Rev. Sarah Averette-Phillips

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
More Ordination photos!

Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
May 19 - a special day in the life of IUCC - a day to celebrate and appreciate - a time to bid farewell and Godspeed. The day’s events will begin at 9:30 a.m. with special music, followed by a service of soaring music, presentations in word and video, and gifts to celebrate Pastor Paul’s 13 years of ministry with us. After the service there will be a reception on the Fellowship Patio for Paul and Carl. I hope you can join us for this milestone for our community of faith.

I first met Paul and Carl at a gathering in our home for the Search Committee. My husband, Keith, was the chair of the committee, and I was Chair of the Administration Board. Paul had met with the committee in a formal setting at the church. More conversation and “getting to know you” continued in our living room. I remember the ease with which Paul answered some “tough” questions from one of the committee members. I remember the grace and caring he projected. I remember thinking “I would like him to be my pastor.” Obviously, that thought was shared by others, as in February of 2006 the congregation unanimously voted to call Paul as our pastor.

After a few years as serving as Chair of the Administration Board, I stepped down from the position and became the Fund Development Chair - think Stewardship Campaign. When Paul arrived as our pastor, our stewardship totals hovered right around $190,000. With Paul’s support and mentorship, we saw that total rise in his first year to over $250,000 and then through the years to over $400,000. He even climbed the roof of Plumer Hall to encourage us to reach for our goals! He challenged us to be the church that God is calling us to be and that meant putting financial resources behind our priorities.

Some of my strongest memories of Paul revolve around his sermons. He has this incredible gift of weaving a picture with words. I can imagine myself in that wooded glen, or in that room, or in that garden, or riding in the car with him - all because of his powerful use of words. Many times tears came springing to my eyes and sometimes those tears overflowed and ran down my cheeks. I remember the time in January of 2007 where several members of our congregation had lost loved ones and I was about to undergo surgery for removal of a cancerous kidney. On that day, Paul spoke of the importance of being there - just being there - for someone in need. It made such a difference to know that I was not alone and that I would be surrounded by a community that cared for me unconditionally. I expect many of you have your own memories centered around one or more of Paul’s sermons.

When I became moderator in 2015, we began meeting on a regular basis - usually in his office. We each had our “assigned” seats - Paul behind his desk and me sitting in one of the chairs in front of his desk. We agreed from the outset that we would both follow the “rule of no surprises,” that we would communicate frequently, that our conversations would be confidential and that we would work together not in a pastor-driven or moderator-driven model but in a congregation-driven model. Through my four years as moderator, I can’t begin to count how many hours we’ve spent discussing hopes and dreams, solving problems, sharing a laugh, shedding a few tears (mostly mine), and just being together in faith and community. For me, those are moments I will always cherish and miss the most.

Besides the gifts of sharing time with me, Paul and Carl also gave me a gift that I see every time I walk through my front door. Several years ago, during the Christmas season, a cylindrical-shaped package arrived. When I opened it up, inside was this doormat. I soon discovered it was a gift from Paul and Carl. Apparently, they had been on an airplane looking at the gift catalog in the seat pocket and had seen the doormat and decided that Keith and I needed to have this. So they had it personalized and sent to us. That gift makes me and others who see it smile. It reminds me of the love we have for our grandchildren and that two special people in our lives recognized that love. Truly a gesture of friendship!

I’m sure you each have your own special memories of Paul and I’m sure you will want to join with all of us on May 19 to celebrate, to remember, to smile and laugh, to shed a few tears and to rejoice together as we celebrate our Pastor, teacher, mentor and friend - the Rev. Dr. Paul Tellstrom!

As always, we will do that in faith and community.

Renae
Wow! It was a busy April, and May promises more of the same. So right upfront, I’ll confess that the Library didn’t “quite” get finished. Best laid plans, and all that. Soon, however; I’m committed to it, because what good is it if it isn’t useful?

In Adult Sunday School we’ll look at the problem of evil and the character of Satan for a couple weeks, take off the week of Pastor Paul’s celebration (May 19), and then Bil Aulenbach will lead four weeks of discussion on two Episcopal theologians – Bishops John Shelby Spong and Eugene Robinson. Bil’s focus: how did events in their lives affect their thinking? You can be sure there will be challenging conversation!

Comma Groups have wrapped up for this program year, and we’ll have our annual Wrap-Up conversation in June - watch for the date! If you’ve been part of a Comma Group this year, be reflecting on the experience so we can learn together. What worked? What needs to be adjusted? What would you like to study next year?

Pastor Paul has been a strong supporter of Comma Groups as a way to create and strengthen our sense of community. I have a hunch that purpose will be even more necessary in the coming year of transition. Plan now to sign up for a Comma Group in August and September!

Our next guest speaker is John Dominic Crossan, and he’ll be here Saturday and Sunday, October 26 & 27. You do NOT want to miss Crossan’s return to IUCC! He has a new book on early images of Jesus’ resurrection, Resurrecting Easter, which is in the church library – along with a lot of his other books.

And don’t forget, we’ve already lined up our speaker for next spring – pastor and author John Pavlovitz, who blogs at johnpavlovitz.com. We have a couple copies of his books available in the church office, if you don’t know who he is.

Tuesday afternoon Bible study is going strong, more than halfway through the New Testament book of Acts. Ken Wyant is back from his travels and eager to lead us all the way through! Join us at 4 p.m. in the new meeting rooms, and afterward at Square One Pizza.

And of course, we’ve got “occasional” offerings like TED Talks with Al Gumb on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays at 10:00, and Yoga of Recovery with Kelly Garrity on the 4th Sunday at 1:30. What would YOU like to learn, or try, or explore? Let me know!
I recently asked some IUCC staff members to share how our beautiful new indoor and outdoor spaces are being used. As we wrap up the capital campaign that made these new spaces possible, it is so gratifying to hear how your generosity is bearing fruit.

Pastor Paul commented:
I feel uplifted by our new space every time I’m on campus. It truly reflects who we say we are. A superb architect and construction firm came together and made a statement that we are here and firmly fixed in our community. The glass reveals life going on inside, and the boulders suggest a steady permanence. Our bold signage welcomes and proclaims our identity. On the inside of our campus, the openness of the new space looks out across a welcoming patio, beautifully landscaped, and the sterile fortress aspect of our oldest building is softened by the presence of this new, welcoming presence.

Because we built this new building, our existing structures have taken on new life. Our former worship space will now be repurposed to house a homeless family this summer through our work with Family Promise. Our preschool has grown, serving more families and creating new jobs. There are times when I see our Scout troop meeting at one end of the campus and Amnesty International at the other. Community. That’s what it’s all about. And, our new space has made this possible.

Pastor Sarah observed:
As the Church grows and shifts, it is evident that “ministry” is also evolving. Getting folks into the pews remains only part of the mission of the Church. We must begin to think creatively about ways to engage the community. We must realize that our call for fellowship lies in connection to people who don’t look, sound, or act like us. And yet, we come together around a common purpose of connection, of justice, of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Our new building at IUCC allows us to do just this. Gone are the days of “If we only had a building” or “We don’t have enough space for all of that.” Now, we can say “Yes” and “Please use our space.” God’s abundance is evident, and we remain so very grateful for the ways this new space will continue to enrich our spiritual lives at IUCC.

Administrative Pastor Steve remarked:
The project has made a tremendous positive impact - by providing much needed extra space for a continually growing program schedule, enhancing our physical visibility in the community, and bringing Sunday morning adult education much closer to worship - in a physical, proximate sense as something that’s not hidden but is “right next to” our worship space. We have also experimented with small/alternative worship in the new space, taking advantage of possibilities for intimacy and greater connection.

Thank you, IUCC, for your generosity! For giving as God gives to us so that we could breathe new life into our aging church campus - growing in our ability to reach out, to serve and to stand tall for our shared progressive Christian values.

Our three-year term to complete capital campaign pledges will end on July 31. We graciously request that you complete all pledges by that date. If you have any questions, need additional information, or have concerns about meeting your pledge or this deadline, please contact me confidentially at capitalcampaign@iucc.org.

Anne Rosse
FOOD PANTRY DONATIONS NEEDED

The harsh reality of hunger in Orange County is that 1 in 5 children are food insecure, unsure of where their next meal will come from.

Currently, the Families Forward food pantry serves over 7,000 low-income individuals each year relying on community donations. Let’s help to fill their shelves with the basic necessities.

We will have a bin on the patio throughout May and June to support their efforts.

The items most needed are (LS – low sodium/low sugar):

- Peanut butter
- Canned fish and chicken
- Plain rice, 2lb. bags
- Cereal
- Canned pasta sauce
- LS - Canned beans, canned chili
- LS - Canned fruit and applesauce
- LS - Canned vegetables
- LS - Hearty canned soups
- LS - Canned tomato products
- Canned pasta/stew
- Pasta (dried)
- Chili, stews
- Fruit juice, boxed juices
- Baby food and baby formula
- Diapers (size 4, 5, and 6)
- Baby wipes
- Toilet paper or paper towels

Families Forward celebrated its 8th year as a 4-star rated charity with Charity Navigator, placing them in the top 2% of ranked charities nationwide and IUCC is honored to support them each year. Thank you.

IUCC Mission & Service Ministry

The 8 Points of Progressive Christianity

By calling ourselves Progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who…

1. Believe that following the path and the teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life;
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of the many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey;
3. Seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to: * Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics, * Believers and agnostics, * Women and men, * Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, * Those of all classes and abilities;
4. Know that the way we behave towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe;
5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes;
6. Strive for peace and justice among all people;
7. Strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth;
8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion and selfless love.
The December 2018 edition of the newsletter featured Early Childhood Center Director Irma Rosales, its leader and fourteen-year employee. This month, the series continues as we feature Miss Mary Tomlinson.

Sound a bugle, somebody, as we introduce Miss Mary Tomlinson, an IUCC Child Care Center teacher who has been with us for twelve years! She is now our lead teacher for the Pre-Kindergarten group.

Miss Mary is a local gal, like Miss Irma. She moved with her family to California from Apache Junction, AZ at the tender age of two, and she has been here in Orange County ever since. She attended public schools in her home town of San Clemente. An honors graduate of San Clemente High School, she continued her education at Saddleback College, focused on early childhood education.

Miss Mary counts as family her Dad, two sisters, and her brothers-in-law. (Sadly, she lost her Mom in 2014.) Miss Mary’s closest friend is also her sister: Nicole. And casting the net just a little more broadly, she views her co-workers at the IUCC Child Care Center as “family,” as well.

When she was a child, Miss Mary was busy playing and pretending, as all children do. But her steady idea was to pretend to be a teacher. Thus, we understand how she came to her current professional position. She says: “I have always had a passion about impacting children’s lives in a positive way. I am a preschool teacher because I adore kids of this age - they are so special! My profession is surely one of the most rewarding, because children show me so much love and compassion. I view each child as if she or he is my own.

That, then, makes it easy to understand when Miss Mary says, “The best part of my job at IUCC is connecting with the children, with their parents, and with my co-workers. I have happily put my heart and soul into this job, this calling: and I will continue to do that for as long as I am able to stay here at IUCC.”

We concluded our interview with Miss Mary by asking a hard question – about the future. (As baseball great Yogi Berra is supposed to have said: “It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future.”)

Boldly, though, Miss Mary gave it a good try. “One goal I have for the future is to write a novel. I am not sure where I will be ten years from now, but I do know that I will continue to progress on the path that God has made for me.”

Good words to live by, from Miss Mary Tomlinson! And, from all of us in the congregation: thank you for a dozen years of faithful service to IUCC, and to the community that we serve.
A good time was had by all at the ECC Easter egg hunt!

Photos courtesy of Irma Rosales
Curious about what’s going on at IUCC? There are many ways to learn more! We hope you enjoy every picture and word in this month’s newsletter. It’s one of many ways to stay informed about IUCC. Here are some others.

Each Friday, Administrative Pastor Steve Swope sends out his “Story from Steve” with a calendar of what’s ahead for the next week and special events or activities happening on Sunday. You can sign up for that email by contacting Steve at iucc@iucc.org. If you think you should be getting it, but you never seem to see it in your inbox, be sure to check your spam folder after 5 p.m. on Fridays. If your email account automatically sorts mail into categories (Gmail does this), you should also look for it in the update or forum category.

You can also always follow the public-facing Facebook page at: https://www.facebook.com/irvineucc where you can find notices about upcoming events, videos and photos of recent events and much more. There’s also a private Facebook group where members post about IUCC activities and related interests. If you’re not already a member you can ask to be included by going to: https://www.facebook.com/groups/123086051013/ Or you can search for the “Group page for Irvine United Congregational Church.”

And, of course, there’s the IUCC webpage: https://www.iucc.org which has an up-to-date calendar and much more.

Your suggestions for the kinds of stories and information that should be included in the newsletter or on the website are always welcome and can be sent through the website by clicking on the “contact” button at the top of the page or email odellcindy19@gmail.com.

Cindy O’Dell
Communications Ministry chair
Climate Change Symposium

by Keith Boyum

The Advocates for Peace and Justice ministry is considering a draft resolution for consideration at the upcoming June 2 congregational meeting. The first “whereas” clause says this:

After study and discernment, and taking advantage of expert information, we find that climate change is an urgent existential threat to God’s creation and to the lives and fortunes of ourselves, of all of humankind, extending unto untold generations

An important element of that study and discernment was an IUCC symposium on climate change on April 28, principally featuring Professor Gudrun Magnusdottir, our fellow congregation member and Professor of Earth System Science at UCI (pictured at right). Drawing on her very considerable expertise, Dr. Magnusdottir took us through the essentials of global warming – yes it is real, yes it is an existential threat, and yes it is caused by human activity – and then took questions and comments from the sixty or seventy who attended the session.

If you missed the symposium, you can find a video of it here. It’s compelling. 
https://iucc.org/did-you-miss-the-climate-change-symposium-watch-or-listen-here/

The Advocates are in the early planning stages to bring to the congregation other opportunities for study, discernment, and action. Watch for them!

Photos courtesy of Felicity Figueroa & Cindy O’Dell
Let’s get together on social media!
Did you know? You can check for updates on our website (www.iucc.org) and look for pictures and videos on our Facebook page and on Instagram!

Coffee Hour Hosts Needed
HELP — IUCC needs YOU to host a Coffee Hour. We have donations to fund the purchase of snacks and juice; we have a budget which supplies us with cups and napkins. And Plumer kitchen is well-stocked with platters and pitchers. But we need friendly folks to host - to buy the goodies, share food and welcome over the table, and clean up after. If you haven't hosted before and this seems overwhelming, we will match you up with an experienced host. We are now taking signups for June 2, 9 & 23 and July 7 & 14 at https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70a0f45acab2ca5f49-iucc to sign up online, or sign up on the sheet on the Coffee Hour table on Sunday mornings.

Thanks,
Sandy and Jan, Hospitality Committee

Farewell to our beloved Pastor Paul & Carl
Sunday, May 19
9:30 a.m. Special Music
10 a.m. Single Service
After the service there will be a reception on the Fellowship Patio for Paul and Carl. We hope you can join us for this milestone in our community of faith.

Yoga of 12-Step Recovery
4th Sunday each month at 1:30 p.m.
Kelly will be continuing her Yoga of 12-Step Recovery sessions on a revised once-a-month schedule. The new schedule is the 4th Sunday of each month at 1:30 p.m. in Plumer Hall.

Isaiah House
Wednesday, May 8, 4 p.m.
Volunteers serve a meal to homeless women at Isaiah House on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. Call (949) 436-1946 for more info.

The Seeker’s Women’s Group
Tuesday, May 21, 9:30 a.m.
The Seekers meet on the third Tuesday of each month for theological and spiritual discussion. Newcomers are welcome! Call Reefa for details - (949) 859-7091.

Coffee Hour Hosts Needed
HELP — IUCC needs YOU to host a Coffee Hour. We have donations to fund the purchase of snacks and juice; we have a budget which supplies us with cups and napkins. And Plumer kitchen is well-stocked with platters and pitchers. But we need friendly folks to host - to buy the goodies, share food and welcome over the table, and clean up after. If you haven't hosted before and this seems overwhelming, we will match you up with an experienced host. We are now taking signups for June 2, 9 & 23 and July 7 & 14 at https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70a0f45acab2ca5f49-iucc to sign up online, or sign up on the sheet on the Coffee Hour table on Sunday mornings.

Thanks,
Sandy and Jan, Hospitality Committee

5/28  Eduardo Arismendi-Pardi
5/10  Johannah Bullington
5/28  Jeffrey Gaskill
5/23  Dave Hodges
5/23  Connie Jones
5/02  Nathaniel KeslerWest
5/25  Jeannie Lee
5/31  Terry LePage
5/23  Christian Murdy
5/19  Cindy O'Dell
5/15  Dale Ramirez
5/29  Mark Rychnovsky
5/26  Scott Rychnovsky
5/02  Elizabeth Schiller
5/05  Barb Sellke
5/29  Richie Sellke
5/05  Ron Steiner
We ended last months’ discussion about the difference between punishment and discipline by pointing out that the “teaching tool” for true discipline was the administering of consequences.

The word “consequence” has the word “sequence” as its root. A consequence is “that which naturally follows” (Webster) or “the effect, result, or outcome of something occurring earlier” (Random House). Imagine that I, as a professional trainer, conduct a training session for a group who are less than thrilled with my performance. When I arrive home, I announce that I plan to relax from a taxing day by watching some television. My family then announces that a call has come from my disgruntled trainees, and that since I did not please the group I will not, in fact, be viewing any television that evening. Is this a “consequence”? or a “contrivance”? There is no “sequence” between displeasing a training class and being deprived of television viewing! There is also no chance I will learn to be a better trainer by not watching television.

The test for a true consequence is this: does it provide the opportunity for the young person to learn a new way to handle things, or is the word being used for something contrived to cause the child some form of pain? My challenge to you, dear readers, is not to be so virtuous as to always assign an appropriate consequence following behavior you do not approve of. My challenge is to be honest with your child. If you are having trouble with your emotions and just want to pay them back in some way for your feelings of hurt, or anger, or embarrassment, and you really do want them to “suffer” a little – just say so. Don’t call it a consequence. Say “this is what you get because I’m mad, and I’m so mad I’m not even going to try to teach you anything.” This is important because in “real life” people receive two kinds of responses to their behavior:
1. They receive a “real consequence,” something we could have anticipated based on what we decided to do; or
2. A response based on who the other person is, and not related to who we are or what we’ve done. This is a “life lesson” it falls on us to teach.

Over my many years, I have visited many dozens of facilities professing to do “treatment” or “special education.” I always made it a practice to ask to see their “behavior management” system, especially as the residents or students would track their progress (in a book, on the wall, in something they carried, etc.). It was unnerving how often I witnessed “consequences” for children/youth that had absolutely nothing to do with their prior behavior! What does a loss of points have to do with a clean room? Or a broken window? How does the “privilege” of watching television relate to having trouble in gym class, or “going to your room” related to being rude or aggressive? I’ve sat in meetings and listened to so-called professionals “scheme” (i.e. contrive) to come up with a punishment for a child that they know will really hurt! I have heard people say, without shame, that they deprived a child of “the only thing s/he cares about.” There are two possibilities for this deliberate infliction of pain: one, a misguided belief that the pain will have long term benefit and produce the desired change; the other, a wish to make a child “pay” for something, especially something we perceive that they have done to us and for which they should suffer. If you cannot connect the consequence to the offense, and the opportunity to learn to do something better next time, it is punishment, not discipline. If you decide to do it, own it.

I am sometimes very unpopular for saying this, but “time out” for a child seems to me like a ridiculous response to behavior. They don’t need time out, they need time in. And what is their exact problem with “time” anyway? Putting an immature person on a chair or in their room and telling them to “think” about what they’ve done doesn’t make a bit of sense if they are “thinking” by themselves. Alone and immature, they are “thinking” that you are mean and that what they did is justified. Children and teens need to “think” with a mature adult, who can help them figure out why their behavior is not acceptable, and of other options for responding to whatever they were having trouble with. How does watching a clock and repeatedly asking “is it time yet?” help them with that? They will not “grow up” in five minutes of sitting alone, even if you tell them to. This may go against some advice you’ve been given from others, but since you’re reading I’ll ask you to “think about it” and we’ll talk again next time.

Editor’s Note: Lorraine has a new book out! It’s called Compassionate Caring: Using our Heads and Heart in Work with Troubled Children and Youth. To learn more, click on: http://press.cyc-net.org/books/compassionate-caring.aspx. When the link opens, you can click on the book cover to open it, read the introduction, and read a sample.
IUCC to Host Homeless Families
August 11–18

Please join the Mission & Service Ministry in providing shelter and hospitality to homeless families from the Family Promise program. They will be with us from Sunday evening, August 11, until the next Sunday morning, August 18, at 8:00. The adults and children will arrive each evening, stay overnight in Plumer Hall, and leave after an early breakfast the next morning.

Volunteers are needed to:

- Stay overnight in the church with the participants
- Provide evening meals
- Shop for breakfast items
- Plan a movie night on the weekend

Please watch for sign-up opportunities after Sunday services starting in mid-May OR contact Sharon Lynn to volunteer (571-236-9517, Sharon.lynn15@outlook.com).

This is your opportunity to directly help these struggling families. Love and kindness always make a difference!

A Comma Group might wish to provide an evening meal during the week. Think about which day would work best for you or your group!

For more information about Family Promise, go to www.familypromiseorangecounty.org
In the early morning hours, before the rising sun peeks into my kitchen, I often sit at the table and ponder life. I appreciate and thrive on that private time. Alzheimer’s causes my husband to sleep more hours, giving me that luxurious quiet with which to begin the day. That’s when I cry.

I cry for George and for our son who died long ago.

Tears are helpful when dealing with emotional pain, but anger has a place also. There are times for women when anger would be the more appropriate reaction, yet we cry. I grew up in the years that in our culture women were not supposed to show anger. “Nice girls are sweet and kind.” It was far more acceptable to cry than yell in anger.

However, Esther entered my life. Esther taught me about the appropriateness of anger. Each day, as I sat by my dying son at City of Hope Medical Center, I noticed a woman who peeked in the door of Todd’s hospital room every time she walked down the hall. Esther was petite with bleached blond, unruly hair that stuck out in a multitude of directions. Her head looked like a spiky planet attached to a body in perpetual motion.

One day, Esther confronted me in the cafeteria.

“Are you that boy’s mother?” No hello, no introduction of self.

I hesitated, then said, “Yes.”

In a close to abrasive sound, she asked, “What’s wrong with him?” No subtlety here!

“He is seriously ill with rhabdomyosarcoma, an aggressive cancer.”

Esther’s sharp dark eyes pierced my wet blue eyes, and she said, “S**t!”

Her words of anger jolted me. They opened some closed compartment, giving me permission to be angry - better yet, to express that anger. Though I wouldn’t have used her word, Esther voiced the raw truth. I found it refreshing. She didn’t say, as some did, “Todd looks much better today,” as I watched my son deteriorate before my eyes.

Esther and I had frank conversations from that day forward. I knew I could tell her the worst. I could fume, I could cry, even sob. I didn’t have to protect her. She and I both knew that it was a shitty situation.

We became so close that when her husband died, she wanted George and me at the memorial service. She asked George to participate. Esther, as a non-practicing Jew, warned my clergy husband, “Just don’t say anything religious!” She asked me to sit with her at the service, inserting me between herself and her daughter. I was kept busy passing Kleenex up and down the row while trying to console her as she howled. There was no holding back. She felt no embarrassment; her barrage of tears was her normal response to grief.

Several months after our son died, I realized that I had to make a decision. Was I going to be forever sad and become a diminished person because of his death, or would I choose to become an enlightened and better person? I made a conscious decision, a choice of the mind, that I would use this tragedy to grow, to become a better person because that is what our son would want.

Have my tears stopped? No. They come now as a tribute to the past and as a welcome relief in the present.