Good morning. It appears like those before me, Lisa, Jeff and Dan… I too had a hard time saying no to Bruce Bendix. And like Jeff, I didn’t totally appreciate what it would be like to follow such eloquent and spiritual testimonials. I must say it is a bit daunting to be last. So I ask that you be patient and remember this is only one story.

As I thought about what to say much of it sounded trite or clichéd. And without going into a potentially dull conversation about the distinctions, (Believe me a Googled it yesterday and read more than I needed), I ask again that you be patient and know that it is heartfelt.

So, what brings me joy and how does my connection to Countryside Church contribute?

Well, “You Had Me at Hello”… From the first Sunday when Wayne Stein came up to my husband Mike and me during coffee hour or better yet when he came up to us the second time, I felt connected to Countryside. How incredibly generous of a complete stranger to extend himself. To ask how we were and care enough to remember the answer. Sometime during the first month, we showed up to the annual “Hootenanny”. Sitting at a table with people we didn’t know, they engaged us in conversation, and made sure we didn’t feel alone. What a community, what generosity.

For those of you who know me, I love communities. Family, friends, schools, dog parks, Girl Scouts, PTAs, car pools, book clubs, ballet classes….if it involves more than one, I’m there. I love the idea of common sets of beliefs, needs, and intentions. The understanding that with more resources, more can be explored, or even accomplished. Communities are far from perfect, it is perhaps in their messiness that I also see joy.

I may be the poster child for the phrase, “The more you put into something the more you get out of it.” With two children, Jane and Grace, in Religious Education, I felt some obligation to participate. As many of you know Colleen Vahey has the most understated way of getting you involved. You may start out teaching Religious Education one month and before you know it you sit on the RE Council and are planning summer curriculum! I have to admit it was one of the best ways to figure out what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. Participating for the last six years, I can say without a doubt that I have learned more than I have taught. That the joy it has brought me far outweighs my commitment.

And you’re right, I am a joiner. From being a member of the Nominating Committee, to co-chairing the Time and Talent Auction and assisting in coordinating the Kinship Ministry I have given my talents. Through these experiences I have met incredible people. People who have challenged my thinking, become a support system, showed me the world from a different lens, people who have become dear friends. These experiences have been a gift.

I wish I could say my connectedness was more far reaching, more altruistic, such as religious freedoms, or social justice, but in the end it is more personal. It is about my family and the rewards they receive from being here. It is about me and my ability to contribute, to change things for the better. We have all found joy here. Countryside has changed our lives in so many positive ways. And as the lyrics from the musical “Wicked” so adequately affirm…”It has changed us for good.”