

# The Founders' Effect

## *The Dreamers, The Trailblazers, The Risk Takers, The Believers*

Frances David, a court preacher in Transylvania, and a Unitarian of the 16<sup>th</sup> century said **“We need not think alike to love alike... We should be allowed to choose among faiths.”** And we are lucky enough to live in a country that allows us to choose and so we have chosen to be Unitarian Universalists. We welcome science and reason, while honoring mystery and wonder. We welcome more deeds than creeds. We have made a commitment to choose to pursue a "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" in our lives. Some of us have come for community and connection, some for social interaction, some for inspiration, some to work toward a greater racial and cultural diversity or help in providing for those who are of need. Some come to sing and some to socialize. There are even rumors that some come for Pat Lakin's incredible deviled eggs, or Mary Delbono's potluck dishes or even Valerie's baked goods!. No matter the reason, we all have in common, as Unitarians, to challenge ourselves individually to seek further in our quest for what contributions we can give to our world, our community and to our own well being.

None of this would be a reality at this point in time in **our** town of Cambria, had it not been for a few UU's who were willing to go out on a limb and challenge themselves with a vision. They have set the mark for all of us in role modeling the courage, perseverance, generosity and hard work that it takes to qualify us as a congregation to be reckoned with. They prepared the way for others to be here today so we can share in this growing community. They were pioneers, and they are our founders here in Cambria. This is their story.....and it's our story too about beginnings: how four UU members embarked on a journey that began first as grumblings or qvetching among fellow travelers, but then transformed to a dream and finally to a fully established Cambrian Unitarian Congregation.

There is a saying, “Some say I'm a visionary, others just say I'm seeing things.” It can be a fine line.

I interviewed all four founding members, Bill Lakin, Dolores Miera, Diane Norton and Janet Cooper because I wanted to know more about the early development of how this community came together. They all concurred that it started when they shared rides to SLO on Sundays to attend the UU church in 2005. Bill described it this way, "Going to SLO we carpoled, Dolores, Diane, Janet and me and we moaned about the drive and how long it took. When the church in SLO was going to move another 15 minutes even further away...that crossed an imaginary line and we, the four of us, decided, "Why not start our own in Cambria?" In the year 2008, the discussion became more serious. Cars are great places to process ideas because there's nowhere to go. Having the space (although very little space) and time to brainstorm ideas, they formed the seeds that sprang into plantings.

These four traveling Unitarians didn't exactly have time to spare in their already very busy lives. But what motivated them?! Dolores wanted to "practice loving" closer to home, provide family connection and community involvement. Diane wanted her town and church to be together because for her, a town is a family and she wanted her church to be part of her family. Janet wanted a UU presence in Cambria and a local place to be with UU's. But the glue that bonded these ideas was the connection between them. Bill put it this way "The four of us got along well, we had common goals." And Janet concurred by adding "we supported one another." That is what really made it happen!

Henry David Thoreau said, "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost. That is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." --

A long tradition of Cambrian UU potlucks had already been established, but our four originators had the courage and foresight to want more.

Genius is talent exercised with courage. - L. Wittgenstein an Austrian philosopher of the early 1950's

They gave an abundance of their time, investigating the rules and regs, laws, tax codes and requirements, practicalities and possibilities of creating their own congregation. It's complicated. They opened their homes for meetings, they offered their money for start up, they risked disapproval and the possibility of failure. And all along the way, they also received positive support from Margaret & Harold, Gianna, Pat, Mary and Dennis. Their desire for a loving community

never swayed. Their goals were diverse. Dolores, the enthusiast of the group kept the principles in action by reminding all of them of the inherent worth and dignity of every person and acceptance & kindness of one another. She wanted to start “A liberal religious home for all those in Cambria who needed one.” Bill wanted to get 30 members on board and became a real congregation. and Diane desired “a place of our own, affordable, and attract younger people.” Janet aspired to find a permanent home and reach “our full potential which is 1% of the population typically. That would be about 60 members to share tasks.” Janet knows things like that.

Bill, kept the inspiration going by pointing out their collective abilities. “This is like running a little business and we all have done that!”

Come to find out, Bill wasn't just talking out of his hat. He knew the logical steps to take. Bill had been a promotion electronic salesman who was a co-trainer, and a promoter. But he also knew advertising. He knew how to use media and had business management abilities. He showed strong leadership, and had a personality that was always up beat, easy, warm & approachable. He also could play bongo drums like a pro! He had been a UU member since 1977 at the Riverside church, described himself as a devout atheist but loved theology so “UU proved to be the perfect place for my needs.” He told me that the first UU minister he encountered drove a white Porsche, played Neil Diamond music, had the congregation doing “ohms...”, presented EE Cummings, Sufi's Eastern Religion and New Age concepts. Bill liked what he saw! Bill was, as Janet it put it, “the guy with the clipboard and did a ton of the original footwork.” That first year, Bill was on fire! He was the liaison between the district and the mother church, in charge of programs, scheduling speakers, head of the worship committee for one year and our President of the Board once we received approval. When the congregation was up and running, he built strong member-relationships by creating a valuable experience for congregants through the sermons he gave. His strategy was to focus on the perceived needs and wants of the customers. And it worked.

Dolores Miera knew how to deal with “red tape.” She was the ideal one to handle the legal part of the new UU Cambria church. Long ago and far away, she spent years working at Ralphs supermarket, first as a cashier, then as their manager. She put herself through UCLA and later became a Certified Public Account in 1984. She has a background in working for Prudential selling insurance, she was a day trader in the stock market. Right now she is the accountant for a firm presiding over 30 attorneys. She employs a number of

people for a collections business on top of her own business, & then also does tax returns for long-term clients. Dolores has been the financial treasurer at the SLO and Ventura UU's and on the board in TO. She has been on social action committees, and workshop committees. She had strong training in the Catholic religion for 16 years. That gave her special insights. Dolores has a ton of tolerance combined with a ceaseless amount of energy but she is also creative and an instigator for building friendships and community. She started as our Treasurer and is currently the head of the worship committee. She provides us with organizing and printing our weekly service. Dolores was instrumental in helping to create a choir for our new-born congregation. She has been a UU for over 30 years

Diane Norton, originally from Michigan, moved from Wilmington, Delaware some 6 ½ years ago to Cambria. She was the realist of the group and the trouble shooter anticipating possible issues or problems that might arise. Her concerns helped to circumvent difficulties and her dedication to the task was inspiring. However, she was the one who verbalized the dream into a reality by describing her vision of "a little white clapboard church with a bell." She is well organized, reliable and dedicated to the task of making a home here for Unitarians. Diane had her own business and spent over 20 years with her own successful framing business. After her move here she became interested in the live theatre by volunteering as a prop person and then graduating to stage manager for many productions that have been presented locally. Diane has been involved in the UU church for 22 years, she was on the social justice committee, gave classes in Women's spirituality and ecology, helped with the district assembly, was on the welcoming congregation committee, was involved with solstice services and a board member at large for two years. She has a green thumb and a gift for flower arrangements. The flowers she brings each week to add to our Unitarian environment create an atmosphere of comfort, warmth and welcoming.

Janet is our newest member from our original board attending the UU church since 2001 and joining the UU congregation in 2005. Janet graduated from Cal Poly SLO in 1979 with a degree in Architectural Engineering. She continued in a Masters program at Univ. of London in Architectural Design. In 1983, she was working for the firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and was involved with designing the Bradley Building at L.A.X. . She was licensed in the state of California in 1988 and is a member of the American Institute of Architects. In addition, she has business management skills, organizational computer skills, detail abilities and a tenaciousness to complete a myriad of tasks. Andrew, Janet's husband, created a very successful sound equipment business for the movie industry starting in 1985. Janet joined him thereby making it a family business in

1988 and they only recently retired in 2008. Janet has a quiet manner of bulldozing her way through the work that needs to be done without complaint.

If you add up all the time our founders have been involved with the Unitarian Church, it is over 90 years! Talk about experience, wisdom, background, intelligences, gifts, and communication abilities all being focused on starting our UU church...it seemed that their collective energy was unstoppable.

After further investigation, the four founders notified their Minister, Helen Carroll from SLO of their intentions. She drove to Cambria for a meeting to discuss the new brewing idea of a Cambrian congregation. I was at that meeting at Bill and Pat's home. It became apparent that she wanted to persuade us possible new bees of having a satellite congregation. What is a satellite congregation? Come to find out she wanted the UU's from Cambria to gather together on Sundays and watch a tape of her service from SLO which she had given the week before. As I recall, she believed that a new congregation would probably fail as there would be too few members to carry the ball and the people who were carrying the congregation would burn out from exhaustion. The satellite idea went over like a "turd in a punchbowl" according to one supporter who shall remain anonymous. Diane Norton had spun a tale so real, and so reachable ...that little clapboard white church in our own town with a steeple, it was moving everyone forward to have a church with a life of its own.

Janet ran articles in the paper to see if anyone else would come to the planning meetings and new faces started to appear at the meetings that were held in Dolores' & Bill's homes. District Executive Ken Brown came up for a meeting and listened as they explained their vision to him. He was happy with the plan and felt they could accomplish their goals. With his blessing, the momentum built. They applied for, and were granted, Immerging Congregation status by the Unitarian Universalist Association.

From that point on, the Cambria UU congregation would be free to give live sermons, free to act on their own needs, free to decide where their money would go, liberated to grow on its own.

"When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy."  
— [Rumi](#)

By April of 2009 they had outgrown meetings in individuals' homes and Diane found the Old Schoolhouse at Allied Arts in Cambria's West Village.

There it was...the little white clapboard church with a bell which was used as a call to worship. The art on the walls surrounded a quaint little area for the new UU's to gather together and it was a thrill to have our own little place. Although the heating wasn't exactly working (we froze in that place) and we had to walk up onto the stage to get to the bathroom, we were still off and running, and were able to grow at the Little School House. When the schoolhouse closed for repairs after a heavy rain, the Lion's Club shut down all activities there with no date of reopening. The founders didn't flinch. We moved to the Veterans' Memorial Building.

Since the official opening of this congregation, the drive and determination of all its members has expanded the activities exponentially. The UU church has taken on a life of its own. Here is what has emerged since our official beginning in 2008.

Small & large potlucks continue monthly.

A paid Musical Director Mary Schwelby who is a professional musician with a fledging choir.

Monthly recycling electronics (voted on by the congregation as our social action project and manned by Gil Eastman, Brad Seek & Bill Lakin.)

A gardening club led attended to by Janet Cooper.

A website (created by Bill's Lakin's son).

A photo taker (Diane D).

An historian & scrapbook maker (Margaret Randell).

A P.R. email communicator creating a directory, weekly service announcements and now a community newsletter by Laurie Napoli.

A games night organized by Valerie and Gil Eastman.

A Sunday lunch gathering after service each week.

A Social justice Committee giving an educational evening called "Transition Towns" with Bob Banner from Hope Dance.

A Librarian creating a Cambrian UU library (Judy Butler).

Providing books for Head Start kids (Judy Butler and Pat Lakin).

A caring committee (Mary Del bono).

A yearly yard sale fundraiser given by Ron and Vern

A comfort quilt given to us by UU's in Delaware (Diane Norton's friend, Karen)

An establishment of a minister's fund which is a short-term gift for someone who is of need.

UU Wall hangings by Eve Jeyes.

Joining the Central Coast Clergy for Justice, an ecumenical, non-profit focused on human rights and environmental issues.

Participation in Cambria's Pinedorado Days.

Sponsoring a local environmental event with a San Luis Obispo environmental group.

Donating our last collection of the month to local charities.

Establishing a benevolent fund for short-term help to needy individuals.

Funding the Cambria 2011 head start program with a \$2,500 grant and 20 children's books.

Our congregation has completed the "Build Your Own Theology" program led by Dolores Miera, and now participating in the "Welcoming Congregation" led by Gil Eastman.

We have supported the UU Service Committee with over 70% membership.

Currently the congregation is investigating the purchase of a commercial condo for meetings.

***Membership Chair Judy Butler helped us bring our total of members to thirty. That's the magic number -- that will allow us to apply for membership and join the UUA in becoming a sustaining community. This will probably happen at the Oct 22 board meeting. And we expect our congregation to be recognized at the 2012 General Assembly in Phoenix (the big Mama church)!***

This church is not just surviving. It is thriving.

**All things appear and disappear because of the concurrence of causes and conditions.**

**Nothing ever exists entirely alone; everything is in relationship to everything else.**

— Buddha

What was the most rewarding experiences in creating the church for our four founders? Dolores: "Seeing it all come together." Diane "That it really happened, we actually did it! That it's thriving and we're meeting new and wonderful people. It was a wonderful struggle. And Bill said, "It was one of the best things I've ever done in my life. Seeing it all happen has been a very rewarding experience."

So, what will it take to continue our success? As the honeymoon period comes to a close and we move into our growing up phase, how do we make love stay?

Did the founders have any conflicts or struggles? Of course! Diane called it "a wonderful struggle." In order to keep our congregation thriving, we need to

model what our leaders taught us: We must continue to practice patience with each other when ideas are different. We must continue to stay in relationship and find out how to repair difficulties that arise within our community. To Deal effectively with disagreements. To *Accept differences*. And always look for the strengths and what you like about each other. Listen more than you speak, make a space for others to flourish. Encourage the next generation of leaders & improve communication with one another again and again and again and again. It is in the repairing of our relationships with one another that we role model a peaceful existence, a compassionate communication system, and acceptance of differences.

Janet pegged the other main concern: “Work and energy are required to keep this group functioning. It’s labor intensive so be prepared for that to avoid burnout. ..disperse the tasks so we don’t feel overwhelmed.” This means getting us all involved so we can back up others and no one feels too burdened or fatigued.

Dolores added “Make sure that people are doing what they love to do.”

Diane put it this way: You have to want it badly enough and work really really hard. It’s a big job.”

And so, our founders have created the Founder Effect touching us all to continue in their footsteps, to provide a nurturing community for our members, grow our congregation, continue our outreach into our community, and be a voice of liberal religion on the Central Coast . Thank you to Bill, Dolores, Diane and Janet. Thank you all.

Songs: “Echoes” by Dar Williams  
From the Musical Rent, “Seasons of Love.”  
This Little Light of Mine.

Reading #1  
“Food for the Spirit”  
By Mary Wellemeyer

In one church it was meals,  
Prepared and frozen

To be shared with those in need.  
Food was handed out at the door,  
Or taken to where it was needed.

In another church it was casseroles,  
Brought to families  
Whose strength was consumed by illness or disaster.

Small gestures, these,  
Little hairs on the roots  
Of community, reaching into the soil  
Drawing the nutrients of earth.

When we sing together,  
Share a meal together,  
Make soup together,  
The hairs on the roots  
Reach out then, too  
Nourishing us in ways beyond the way  
We may think we know.

The dark soil is full of nutrients.  
We feed without knowing.

#### Reading #2

Victoria E. Safford had this to say about the UU church. “This is a saving church and a church that acts. It is also a church that asks, and wonders, unafraid of questions that may go unanswered, unafraid of answers that may challenge its assumptions.”