

## Homecoming

By Tom O'Leary

There is a scene in Charles Dickens' novel *Nicholas Nickelby* when the servant Smythe---who is crippled from a life of daily beatings and abuse but who is about to finally escape---turns to Nicholas Nickelby and asks, "Is *there* better than *here*?" In Smythe's harrowing plea there is a lifetime of sorrow. "Is *there* better than *here*?" Nicholas assures Smythe that there is better than here.

For many decades now men and women have been escaping *there* for *here*. We have been leaving the small unaccepting towns of Kansas and Missouri and Indiana and Ohio for the freedom and acceptance of San Francisco and New York City and Provincetown.

We leave home, I believe, to find home.

The dictionary defines home as; "A valued place regarded as a refuge." For so many of us---including myself---Provincetown is that valued place regarded as a refuge.

John Waters tells a story about Provincetown in the 60's, saying, "I remember the funniest thing: seeing Judy Garland walking down the street with 10,000 gay people following her like the pied piper. She went into the little A-House. She was dead drunk, in bad shape, having fun, wearing a big hat. It was like the Virgin Mary appearing, a miracle."

When I first walked down Commercial Street in the 1970's it felt as if I'd walked into a carnival and the carnival immediately felt like home. On my first visit here Divine was performing on one side of the street and Wayland Flowers and Madam were on the other. And all of the men and women I saw on Commercial Street seemed as if they had become who they truly wanted to be.

Michael Cunningham has written, "Provincetown is by nature a destination. It is the land's end; it is not en route to anyplace else. One of its charms is the fact that those who go there have made some effort to do so."

We find ourselves gathered here today in the U.U. Meeting House because this was our destination. We left *there* for *here*. And here is home. Here is our valued place regarded as refuge.

In this room, this home, I stood in this pulpit eleven years ago and gave my first sermon and paid tribute to my beloved Rick Morin, who had just passed on.

In this room, this home, while my play *The Negative Room* was playing in the room below, I discovered that my best friend Chris would be having a child with her partner. And in this room her beloved son Daniel, my godson, was baptized.

In this room, this home, my friends Wil and Bryan declared their committed love for each other in front of friends and family.

In this room, this home, during my first summer living in Provincetown year round, a frail but determined man stood up and declared he had AIDS and that he had planned his trip to his cherished Provincetown from his hospital bed two months earlier.

I work at Project Angel Food in Los Angeles. We deliver lunch to men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS or other serious illnesses. I try to keep tabs by phone with clients I've become close with. A favorite client, Wanda Marie, had more health battles than could be found in a medical dictionary. When I would phone her, Wanda Marie would always call me "darlin'" without the g at the end. "I love you, darlin'" she'd say. I would respond, "I love you too." When I asked how she was Wanda Marie always said, "Oh, you know, darlin', I'm just tryin' to stay alive." When I found out last year that Wanda Marie had passed on I knew immediately that Wanda's voice on the phone to me was home. As *The Science of Mind* would say, Wanda Marie and I shared a holy relationship because we always wished each other well. Always. Without thought or fear.

This U.U. Meeting House we are blessed to find ourselves in is sacred and it is home. For those of us who are privileged to sit in these pews every Sunday and for those of us who are here once a year---we are home.

In this sacred room we are thoughtful and silent and still. We share a holy relationship with each other because we come here to wish each other well, to lift each other up. We have made the long journey in our lives away from the hurt and unacceptance and fear of *there* for the freedom and serenity and peace of *here*.

In the wonderful 1930's screwball comedy *My Man Godfrey* a character says, "All you need to start an asylum is an empty room and the right kind of people."

We---all of us---are the right kind of people and we have come to a valued place we regard as refuge. We are the shining sons and daughters of America. We are the fulfilled promise of a collective dream.

I believe we share this sacred space today with my beloved Rick Morin and with all of the shining friends and lovers and family who have gone on before us.

I believe we share this sanctuary today with every prayer ever prayed in this room. Prayers of triumph or fear or serenity or sorrow.

We are here today with those who have shared our sacred journey of life together.

And we are here with those who only came with us part of the way.

We are here liberated from the *there* we came from. As Living the Science of Mind says, *We know that we are One with all Peace, all Power and all Good.*

How could we not be?

We have reached land's end.

We have come home.