

HOW JEFF CAMPBELL BECAME A UNIVERSALIST

This story is about Jeffrey Worthington Campbell and how he became a Universalist. Jeff was born in 1910 – more than 100 years ago. He and his younger sister, Marguerite, grew up in Nashua, New Hampshire. His family, however, was different. His mother was Euro-American with a heritage that went back to the founding of America, while his father was an African-American lawyer. Back then a mixed marriage was very unusual.

Jeff's family did not belong to a church and when he was 10 years old he decided that he wanted to go to church. His Mother said go ahead. But now he had to decide which church to attend.

The first Sunday he chose a nearby protestant church. He went to worship. That was okay. Then he attended the Sunday School and that was good enough. And afterward the children got a snack; it was a warm glass of apple juice and a graham cracker. It was fine morning but he thought he'd keep looking.

The next Sunday he went to another church. It was a little different, but pretty much the same. There was worship and music and friendly people and Sunday School, except at the end of the morning, after they served the warm apple juice and graham crackers the children were allowed to come back for seconds. Not bad, he thought, but decided to keep looking.

The third Sunday Jeff went to a Universalist Church. This was before the Universalists and the Unitarians got together to form the Unitarian Universalist Association to which we belong. You could tell you were in a Universalist Church because over the doorway or above the altar you would find the words "God is Love." Well, this Sunday went like the others. There was worship and Sunday School and the people were nice, but when it came to the apple juice and graham crackers something different happened. They let him help himself to as much as he wanted. He thought 'This is the place for me' and the next week he brought his sister, Marguerite.

And guess what? Jeff grew up and became a Universalist minister. He was not the first African-American Universalist minister, but when he graduated in 1935 he was the only one. Later he also became a Unitarian. But this story is a sad one because back then white Universalists and Unitarians were not ready to have a black minister, so he only ever served as a minister in a couple of part time positions, while he worked full time as an English teacher. His sister also remained faithful to Universalism and spent over 30 years working in the headquarters of the UUA.

There is something else. I think you may already have figured this out. You know Jeff did not really stay because of the warm apple juice and graham crackers, he stayed because ours is a religion that encourages you to help yourself and gives you the freedom to take as much as you want.

It is time for Sunday School, so go do it! (I would substitute Church School for Sunday School)