

## ADVENTURES IN FAITH

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup>Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. <sup>3</sup>By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. <sup>4</sup>By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. <sup>5</sup>By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and 'he was not found, because God had taken him.' For it was attested before he was taken away that 'he had pleased God.' <sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. <sup>7</sup>By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith. <sup>8</sup>By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup>By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup>For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup>By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup>Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.'* (Hebrews 11:1-12, NRSV)

I heard about her before I ever met her. Someone said to me, “You’ve got to meet her. She’s great. You’ll love her.” And then I did. I’d only been in Manhasset for a few days when Maggie Grundman bounded through my office door to say welcome. As soon as I heard her beautiful Southern accent, discovered her sense of humor, and understood how much she loved children, I knew I had found a kindred spirit. I’ve been under the spell of Maggie Grundman ever since and I’m not alone, just look at this crowd who has turned out to honor her today.

I remember saying to Maggie, “I’ve heard that you run a program called Adventures in Learning. Tell me about it.” The conversation that started that day has continued to this day. The story of Adventures in Learning is the story of Maggie Grundman, though interestingly she did not dream up the program nor could she have kept it going all these years without help from a wonderfully diverse group of people, from high school students to investment bankers...but now I’m getting ahead of myself.

It all started back in the tumultuous 1960's when social change and social unrest often went hand in hand. The dream of Adventures in Learning came following one of the saddest days our country has ever known, April 4, 1968 when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. The preacher of peace and lover of love had been killed, and among the looming questions one crucial one emerged—can we keep Dr. King's dream going without Dr. King. Dr. Jerry Parker, the minister of our church at the time, must have wondered the same thing. He wanted to help. He wanted our church to help, but he did not know what to do. Then Dr. Parker had an idea—why not send an ambassador of goodwill over to the Spinney Hill neighborhood. Dr. Parker needed someone with compassion, enthusiasm, a can-do attitude, and the ability to communicate with anyone. Among those who came to mind was Maggie Grundman who never met a stranger. Dr. Parker asked Maggie to visit the neighborhood and start the conversation. She did just that, and what she heard was the need for an after-school tutorial program to reduce the relative disparity of educational opportunities in Manhasset. In 1969, our church and Maggie both made commitments. Our church committed to funding the program. Maggie agreed to get the program off the ground for six weeks and then hand it over to someone else. Adventures started on April 29, 1969. It's now local legend that Maggie's six weeks lasted over 34 years!

Things started out with students meeting after school at Munsey Park for two years, and Shelter Rock the next two years. After that, it moved to its current location in the EOC building on High Street. Through the years, Adventures grew in the number of children served and the number of volunteers who showed up to help.

Many of those volunteers are sitting here today—volunteers who've helped the kids with their homework, read them stories, fed them snacks, and provided a listening ear; volunteers who've served on our board and chaperoned trips. Thank you for being there for these kids.

One volunteer in particular, who showed up in the early 1990's, eventually propelled Adventures to a new level. When Traci Quackenbush began volunteering with Maggie, Adventures served 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. Everything changed on Christmas Eve, 1994, when Chris and Traci Quackenbush's Jacob Marley Foundation gave Adventures in Learning a substantial financial gift. This unexpected generosity left Maggie speechless, which doesn't happen very often. Our church had been the sole substantial supporter of Adventures for 25 years and now it was as if Adventures had won the lottery! Maggie had always tried to be realistic about how far she could expand the program, but now she could dream big and with Chris and Traci's help make those dreams come true.

The Adventures classrooms received total facelifts with new carpeting, paint, and murals. The worn out furniture was replaced with beautiful new tables, chairs and bookshelves. Next came wonderful new computers and books. With the addition of new staff, the program expanded to accommodate children through the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The mission of Adventures continues to grow as today it offers Scout troops, a book club, computer skills, a chess club, a library, foreign language instruction, arts and crafts, and

African dance instruction. The Adventures kids started taking more trips for cultural and sports events including “A Christmas Carol” at the theater at Madison Square Garden, Mets games at Shea Stadium, and the circus at Nassau Coliseum.

Everything was coming up roses for Adventures in Learning and it only lacked one crucial element, a highly functioning Board of Directors who would ensure the ministry for years to come. In the late 1990’s Chris Quackenbush and I lamented that Adventures had no formal institution. We concluded that Maggie Grundman *was* the institution and wondered what would become of Adventures after Maggie, not that either of us could imagine that day. I still can’t. I told Chris I’d recruit the members if he’d be the chair and that’s how the board began. Always looking for ways to improve Adventures’ financial base, Chris quickly concluded that we could raise more funds if the program incorporated as an adjunct organization to the church. Board member and lawyer turned judge, Howard Miller agreed to spearhead the project in 2001.

Due to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Chris did not live to see his dream of an incorporated Adventures in Learning come to fruition in 2002. According to the Adventures by-laws, the Board of Directors consists of 15 members, 9 from our church, 5 from the community, and 1 from the Jacob Marley Foundation. Currently church member, Joan Walter, serves as chair. Last fall the Board under the leadership of event planner *par excellence*, Liz Abbott, hosted its first large-scale fundraiser at North Hempstead Country Club.

Adventures has come a long way since Dr. Parker sent Maggie Grundman to start a conversation back in 1969. Maggie’s life has been a much greater adventure because of Adventures. Maggie, thank you and congratulations on completing 34 amazing years with Adventures in Learning. Hundreds upon hundreds of children have found the nurturing and love they needed through you and Adventures. What would have happened to these children without Adventures? Would they have learned to love reading? Would they have learned the necessity of math? Would they have learned that regardless of what was going on at school or at home that there was a place where they were always loved? How many children went on to graduate from high school, vocational training, or college thanks to your help, guidance, and inspiration? We do not know, but God knows and God says, “Well done my good and faithful servant.” And so do we. Well done our good and faithful Maggie. For your caring and compassion, for your teaching and tenacity, for your patience and love, we say thank you for literally changing the world.

Your 34-year journey has truly been an adventure in faith, faith that you could make a difference, faith that others would show up to help you, faith that you could keep going even when you felt discouraged, faith that God had put you on this earth for a reason.

In today’s scripture lesson from Hebrews chapter 11 we have a partial list of people who’ve had their own adventures of faith, those men and women whose hearts were full of God’s love and whose hands were busy doing God’s work. The list includes such well-known biblical figures as Noah, Sarah, Abraham, and Moses, and such lesser-

known people as Enoch and Barak. None of these people were perfect, but they all actively followed God in significant ways.

What has sustained Maggie through these many decades of leading Adventures in Learning? Her faith. In Hebrews 11:1 & 2 we read, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it people of old received divine approval.” We are here today to thank Maggie for her tireless work on behalf of children who have always been near and dear to her loving heart.

More than one person I know has called Maggie a saint, and I believe there is some truth to this assertion, though she’s got plenty of the devil in her as well! Frederick Buechner says the following about saints, both historic and modern day: “In [God’s] holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a pocket handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints...The feet of saints are as much of clay as everybody else’s, and their sainthood consists less of what they have done than of what God has for some reason chosen to do through them...Saints are essentially life-givers. To be with them is to become more alive” (*Wishful Thinking*, Revised & Expanded Edition, p. 102).

We at The Congregational Church of Manhasset have been privileged to have God drop Maggie Grundman here among us for these many years. In addition to her work with Adventures, Maggie has been our Wedding Hostess for many years and chaired our Board of Deacons. Knowing and working with Maggie has been a great honor and privilege, and besides that it has been great fun. For many of us, our time working with Maggie has indeed been an adventure in learning, learning how to put love into action, learning how to rely on faith to get you through, and learning how literally one person can change the world. God bless you Maggie, for you have been such a blessing to us. AMEN.

Written by Rev. Jimmy Only

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Maggie Grundman Sunday

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The Congregational Church of Manhasset, New York (UCC)

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

Loving God, who considers us your beloved children regardless of our age, we thank you this day for people who have invested their lives in children. How much we appreciate teachers and youth workers, coaches and scout leaders, band directors and mentors of every kind. We are especially grateful this day for Maggie Grundman and her tireless work for children through your ministry of Adventures in Learning. For all of her nurturing and care, her kindness and teaching we give you thanks. Thank you for all the volunteers and staff through the years who have kept Adventures going—Traci and Chris Quackenbush, Esther Blocker, Diana Holden, Niknesha Hairston, Sandy Zaremba, and so many others who have invested their time and money to make a lasting difference in the lives of children. We ask your continued blessing on Adventures as it moves into a new era. Give the Adventures Board wisdom and insight as they seek future leaders.

Thank you, O God, for Chase, Anne, and all the youth going to serve you by serving others in Richmond, Virginia. Empower them to love as Christ loved and serve as Christ served. Calm any fears among the youth or their parents and bring them all safely home when their work is done.

Through Jesus Christ, the Good Teacher we pray. AMEN