



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

The Grand Dragon and the Rabbi

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

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Larry Trapp was the Grand Dragon of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Nebraska. He lived an isolated life in his apartment, confined to a wheelchair after having had both of his legs amputated because of diabetes. He was also nearly blind. Larry Trapp spent his time and money trying to instill fear in those whom he considered inferior. In 1991, Michael Weisser, his wife Julie, and their three children moved to Lincoln, NE. Michael was the new cantor at a Lincoln synagogue. Shortly thereafter, he found an unidentified voice on his answering machine, "Jew boy, someone will make you sorry you moved here." Hateful things arrived in their mail. One of them said "The KKK is watching you, scum."

Michael figured out who was responsible for the campaign of hate and he began to call and leave messages on Larry Trapp's answering machine saying things like "Larry, there's a lot of love out here, and you're not getting any of it, don't you want some?" He left one message a week. Then one time Larry answered the phone and asked why Michael was harassing him, what did he want? Michael said, "I understand that you are disabled. I thought you might need a ride to the grocery". Somewhat flustered, Larry eventually stammered, "I have it covered, but thank you."

Then one night, Larry Trapp called the Weisser's home and said, "I want to get out of what I'm doing and I don't know how." Michael and Julie Weisser jumped in their car and went over to Larry's apartment and talked into the night. A bond beyond friendship grew and eventually the couple took Larry into their home to care for him. Before he died, in the bedroom in the Weisser's home, Larry Trapp had renounced hatred and his affiliation with the Klan, joined the NAACP and converted to Judaism. The story of the Klansman and the Cantor became a book titled *Not by the Sword* by Katherine Watterson. Michael Weisser is now the rabbi at the Free Synagogue in Flushing, NY.

We have here the modern retelling of the story of Saul the persecutor of the early Christians who became the most ardent follower of Jesus Christ. We know Paul's story, his moment of awakening when he was knocked off of his horse by a blinding light, followed by three days of blindness. When his eyes were opened, he saw truth and love. Something changed him fundamentally the same way that an offer of a ride to the grocery changed Larry Trapp. We hear these stories and we say "wow! That's really amazing." We don't often dive in

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to understand what happened that brought about such transformation. Larry Trapp's story tells us that it isn't a phenomenon found only in the mythic stories. It is a real possibility in any moment. Until we unlock the mystery of such a dramatic change in a person we will be left to write it off as a miracle. It is miraculous, but it is also possible in any moment. I believe that we need to understand what happened and for that, we need an appreciation for God's creation through a bit of science and what it truly means to be having this human experience.

I bring this to you with my non-scientist approach, seeking to interpret this wonder and what it means. Everything that exists is energy in some form, light, sound, water, air, the pew you are sitting on and you yourself. Energy also creates fields or spaces with specific vibratory rate. Living things in particular use biological processes to generate fields of particular vibrations, or frequencies.

Now when it comes to humans, we have also discovered that emotions produce different energy frequencies within the brain and the energy fields associated with those frequencies can be measured outside the body as well. Different emotions create different frequencies. I bet you have even experienced it yourself when you were around someone who is peaceful, joyous, and happy. It feels very different than being around someone who is angry, fearful and unhappy. And of course you feel more comfortable around someone who is emanating the same frequency of emotional energy as you do. It's one of the reasons we hang around with like minded people – there is a sympathy of energy.

Our stories today show us examples of people with energy fields filled with rage. Larry Trapp and Paul, the persecutor of the followers of Jesus, were both destined to remain in the energy of hatred until something introduced a different frequency. Michael Weisser expressed concern for Larry Trapp, and the energy behind that response was so surprising that it interrupted everything Larry Trapp had ever thought about "those dirty Jews." Paul's energy field was flooded with a very different kind of information. Larry and Paul were both changed. The energy of fear and hatred were transformed by love.

I think that in the stories of those who encountered Jesus we are seeing the experience of such a powerful energy field that it could flood and transform the energy of sickness, hatred, even death. That is the work of Christ – to flood all life with the pure energy of love.

The implication of understanding Jesus as a pure energy field is that we then understand our spiritual practices as the way we work to clear our own fields of the darker energy of fear, anger, resentment so that we will become more like him. Michael Weisser shows us that we do not need to be Jesus himself to bring transforming energy into someone's life.

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Let's look at a couple of important parts of the story of the Klansman and the cantor. First Larry's energy was locked in his commitment to hatred. Michael and his wife decided to respond to the ugliness without adding more to the equation. They were proactive, they did not merely try to sit still and hope that the hatred would stop, they engaged it directly. To say that they extended themselves, willing to become even more vulnerable, is an understatement. They fully engaged and embraced Larry's negative energy, transforming and cleansing his energy fields. When Larry died he was a man at peace, no longer a prisoner of the hatred he had nursed for so long.

If someone were to ask me, I would have to say that Larry's story is more powerful than Paul's, because there is nothing supernatural about it. It is a story of how human courage and compassion can transform someone else's negative emotional energy, and with it, his thoughts and behaviors. There is nothing here that we cannot emulate. Michael Weisser did respond to Larry as a righteous Jew, inspired by his ancient tradition of faith. So I'm not claiming that God didn't have something to do with it, but it was still the choice of Michael and Julie to act according to their faith. They did what we are meant to do – be instruments of healing, love and transformation for each other. It didn't happen instantly, but Larry gradually responded to the energy of love that was extended to him. His courage deserves recognition also. It's hard to allow your entrenched convictions to be challenged and invaded by a different way of thinking. This is the journey of transformation, growing into the frequency of love and being changed by it.

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