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## **Our legacy of love and affection**

### **By The Rev. Rhett D. Baird - Special to The Telegraph**

I was five, running through a field barefooted. The weeds were high. I didn't see the carelessly discarded glass bottle. My foot crunched hard on top of the jug, and glass went deep into my foot.

I have vague memories of the pain, the hospital, the stitches. But what I really remember is later, my brother carrying me on his back to the field to have a look. The experience of being carried by my brother was an experience of being loved. Over the years, we continued to take turns, figuratively, carrying each other through the fields of our lives, with love.

Our need to be loved and, in turn, to love others, is a basic mark of what it means to be human.

My aunt Ruth was a seamstress. I can still hear her cheerful laughter that was almost a trademark of her personality. She was plump. She shook all over when she laughed. Sort of like Santa Claus. She did not allow strife or problems to stifle her laughter - laughter at herself and at the world. She made me a red wool coat, warm and beautiful. It was a gift of love. Each time I put it on, I felt embraced by this jolly old woman.

My aunt Petie taught me how to save regularly. Her husband, Hubert, taught me how to fly fish and make flies and casting nets. They also loaned me money to buy an old car when I was 17. Petie believed in me and was proud of me. I knew it then. I know it now.

I was fortunate to have many caring people in my life feeding my soul. Think about those people who have been or are a source of love and affection in your life. People who - through their presence, actions, words, silence - have invited you into a deeper understanding and feeling of what it means to be loved, to be accepted and respected for who you are. Someone, perhaps, who took the time to encourage you, to affirm your personhood, to care for you in some important way.

Some years ago, in an experimental program, elderly volunteers came to a hospital nursery on a regular basis simply to hold the babies: touch them, love them, hug them, talk to them. Not only did the babies thrive, but the overall health and vitality of the elderly people who participated in the program increased as well.

I was impressed recently when I observed a young dad cooing and playing with his baby in a sandwich shop while the mom worked behind the counter. I knew the love expressed would impact that baby all of her days.

The human need to be loved and, in turn, to love others, is real and present and powerful in each one of us, with no exception.

All religions that have sustained the lives of people over time have in common the promotion of love and affection, care and compassion. I believe that all humans have an intuitive knowledge that our acts of love help shape the next generation. The nature, depth and healthiness of the love we receive help define who we are and strengthen our capacity to give love and compassion back to the world.

What will be your legacy to future generations?

The Rev. Rhett D. Baird is a minister at High Street Unitarian Universalist Church in Macon.