

LEAVING THE URBAN LIFE CENTER: AN INTRICATE PROCESS

I go back in memory to a moment in 1980, when I was announcing to my colleagues at the YWCA storefront in Framingham, Massachusetts, that I was resigning from the job I had held for the past eighteen months. I had decided to follow an uncharted pathway ahead that I hoped would lead to new work together with my husband in Boston. Libby Klim, a fellow worker with whom I had commuted from her home in Cambridge and mine in Dorchester, turned to me and mused quietly, “*I am going to watch how you leave.*”

That thought had never occurred to me. “How I leave?” I, as always, was preoccupied with that uncertain road ahead. Those words of hers have haunted me over the years, and I have often repeated them to persons in my present life work. It is not the *act* of leaving itself—as central as it always is—but the *how*.

I have written many pieces concentrated on *beginning* something new, but I now unearth the ones tracking some of my *leavings* over a lifetime. Ruffling through my files, I come upon the writings that spontaneously flowed out from my pen when I was entering upon a season of beginning to leave—and eventually moving on to a new stage of my life and work.

There were different ways, but it is instructive to see how often the impulse to enter into something new far preceded the actual date of moving away and into that new work. This was the case in leaving the Urban Life Center in 1979. First, Don and I instinctively spent time apart on retreat, an experience I recorded in *Journey into Silence*. When the time drew near to make more definite plans, we went on *sabbatical*. we saw how we might engage in something related to our present work, but distinctively different as a way to stay close to the larger themes of our vision and interest, but separate enough organizationally to make an objective decision. The sabbatical was necessary, giving time for me to recognize the particular resonance in leaving a “child I had helped birth.” What do I, a woman who has never been pregnant, know about birthing? The sabbatical proved to be my way of seeing *how the leaving unfolded over time*.

The details of the sabbatical experience is recorded in *The Sabbatical Process*.