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Rev. Leona Stucky reads from *The Fog of Faith: Surviving My Impotent God*
6 p.m. Tuesday, June 13
Op.Cit. Books, 157 Paseo de Peralta, 505-428-032

From The Fog of Faith: Surviving My Impotent God

At sixteen, I still was no dumb bunny, but I no longer was His sunbeam. At sixteen, the contradictions were gathering like clouds before the storm. Only what He consented to would be done. Right? God did not consent to my death, and I was alive. Yet did He consent to the violence against me? Did He consent to the forced sex?

If He made Ron stop murdering me, why didn't He do it sooner? Couldn't He have brought Ron to his senses immediately? Ron could have suddenly said, "I think God is talking to me! He doesn't want me to kill you."

Was I the one who stopped murder? I endured him until he exhausted himself. I held and calmed him. I suggested the last supper, and I found a way out of the situation by promising never to leave. ©Leona Stucky

Jennifer Levin

When she was a little girl, Leona Stucky believed that a boogeyman lived in the closet at the top of the stairs and goblins huddled under her bed. As she headed up to sleep each night, the terrified four-year-old would pray out loud. Upstairs was dark and scary, and she wanted the monsters to know that she had God on her side. The ritual ended with Stucky taking a flying leap across the floor to her mattress before anything could grab her feet.

“All the time that I was sweating those potential realities, I was assisted by my faith. I could go upstairs because I wasn’t alone. Some people carry that faith with them through their whole lives,” said the Rev. Stucky, who is a local Unitarian Universalist minister. “Some people believe in God’s love, but others see the reality of suffering in the world. And when you look at that reality, it’s very difficult to believe that there’s any kind of powerful or loving God.”

As she writes in her self-published memoir, *The Fog of Faith: Surviving My Impotent God*, Stucky grew up on a rural Kansas farm, bathed in the warm embrace of a large family in a tight-knit religious community. Life was far from idyllic; farming was hard work — Stucky took pride in being her father’s helper — and there was never enough money to keep the rambling homeplace in good repair. Her mother, who had multiple sclerosis, eventually came to depend on a wheelchair and lost the ability to clearly communicate with her children. Though Stucky’s father was strong and capable, a burn accident when he was seventeen left his legs swollen and covered with open sores. Their Mennonite faith, central to their existence, was one of peaceful engagement and nonviolence. This belief was so strong that Stucky’s father spent time behind bars rather than go to fight in the Korean War. Despite the hardships, as a child, Stucky knew that God was good and that nothing bad could ever radically alter the course of her life.

In 1966, at age sixteen, she met Ron. The shy non-Mennonite boy did not smoke or drink, and the two became sweethearts. But after a while, he became too possessive for Stucky — and on the night that she planned to break up with him, before she had even broached the subject, Ron somehow sensed what was coming and flew into a rage. His physical and sexual assault of Stucky — which cracked her foundation, shattered her faith, and changed her future — is the main dramatic plotline of *The Fog of Faith*, which she reads from on Tuesday, June 13, at Op.Cit. Books.

Stucky quickly realized that neither she, nor God, nor her father could save her from Ron, who began abusing her regularly. “It was before feminism, and the world I grew up in was in some ways even earlier than the day. It was more like the 1950s than the ’60s — and being a rural area, closed off from the world, it could have been the 1920s or the late 1800s,” she said.

She became pregnant at seventeen and was forced to marry the young man who treated her like a sex slave. A series of events led her to convince Ron to move to Boston, and so, child in tow and barely old enough to vote, they resettled in a big city, far away from the comforts of family. As

Ron continued to be violent, there finally came a time when Stucky was able to get out of the relationship — but only inasmuch as she understood she was not fated to be with him. Ron spent years stalking her. Despite this, Stucky was saved by her own pluck and by the city's social safety net, which allowed her to go to college, collect welfare benefits, and live with her son in public housing. Decades later, long after Stucky had remarried and after Ron had done more than one stint in prison for his actions, he continued to show up at her family's functions looking for her.

In the mid-1990s, after her second marriage broke up, Stucky moved to Santa Fe, where she accepted a position as the campus minister at the College of Santa Fe. Her role there was more student psychologist than spiritual leader, because the college was historically Catholic and she has advanced degrees in counseling and psychotherapy. She is now in private practice as a pastoral psychotherapist, which she explained is different from Christian counseling. "It's about meaning-making. The pastoral counselor uses whatever they experience on their own spiritual journey that makes them a seeker of life's meaning as a part of their therapeutic self that does the work of therapy. I can't speak for every pastoral counselor, but for the most part we are not trying to make people become Christians, nor is counseling just for Christians."

People often suffer greatly because of internal contradictions over their belief in God that they are either unaware of or have never reckoned with, Stucky said. For instance, many people who think they believe in God really only believe a fraction of the time, and many people who say they are atheists actually believe in God when facing their own mortality. "The biggest mistake we make is thinking we are just one thing. We believe differently at different times."

For Stucky, faith is not just a feel-good opportunity, and it is infinitely more complicated than adhering to the tenets of a religion. "Most of us have some sense that being a part of a faith community makes us good, but when push comes to shove, that's when you have to ask yourself what you really believe. In the Mennonite community, you better believe what you say you believe, because it's going to threaten your life if violence comes your way."

Had she never met Ron, Stucky said she might have married a man from her community. But try as she might, she cannot imagine having lived her whole life as a farmer's wife in Kansas. "I just have a mind that asks too many questions. At some point, I would have to have gotten out." As far as her own faith goes, she considers herself spiritual but not religious, because religion is so weighted with the need for creed. "I really function without a creed. What I would say is that I hold the opposite ends and do the integrating as best I can," she said. "Like everybody else, I'm one place at one moment and another place at another moment. Although the amount of questioning that I do is really the questioning of a skeptic."