

**Certificate of Awesomeness**  
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Summer Minister  
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto  
28 July, 2013

N.B.—These sermons are made available with a request: that the reader appreciate that, ideally, a sermon is an oral/aural experience that takes place in the context of worship—supported and reinforced by readings, contemplative music, rousing hymns, silence, and prayer—and that it is but one part of an extended conversation that occurs over time between a minister and a covenanted congregation. All photographs are by Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

The YouTube video **Where the hell is Matt?** offered some inspiration for this sermon.

It is available at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlFKdbWwruY>



When Matt Harding decided he no longer wanted to write shoot'em-up video games, he left his programming job, disillusioned, and went out, with whatever savings he had, to travel the world, and share what his friends called “that stupid dance you do” with whoever else felt like joining him. And then, from practically all corners of the world, he shared his jig, sometimes alone, and other times with strangers and fans. From the Panama Canal and the Cape of

Good Hope; from the Korean Demilitarized Zone and Lemur Island; from the Vava'u Ocean, with whales, to the zero-G simulation plane in the Nevada airspace; from New Zealand to Montreal; Matt brought the awesomeness of the world to us, as he brought his own version of awesomeness to his fellow earthlings.

Starting with a modest video in 2005, Matt has dedicated now a significant portion of his life, energy, and available wealth, to sharing with the world the opportunity to party with the world. After going viral, Matt welcomed his fans to join in the making of his 2008 video, becoming a YouTube sensation that year, with a video that has reached over 43 million views.

It is not difficult to see where Matt's work draws its appeal. Upon watching, a growing consensus has been building up: it is awesome!

The brand of awesomeness displayed in Matt's *Dancing* video includes, as its basic elements, the ability to inspire awe from the simple pleasure of dancing, to enhance awareness for our common love of it, and to bear witness to its power.

I am personally quite awed by the balance of dedication and light-heartedness displayed by Matt in putting together this video: in travelling to so many places to sample the richness and common bonds of our fellow travelers on planet earth, and giving us a taste of what they have to offer, all to the sound of beautiful music.

I am inspired by the enhanced awareness that it brings in displaying the encompassing desire that many of us share, literally around the globe, to get together and dance.

And moreover, I am grateful for the witness that Matt—and others like him—bring by celebrating this joy, and this fight for the right to party... worldwide!

Indeed, an overlooked part of Matt's video is the last few seconds. The few moments where it is noted that it is in fact *not* Matt's video, but a collaboration by Matt and his girlfriend Melissa, along with dozens of technical assistants and friends... and even a corporate sponsor.



I must admit I was a bit uneasy about showing the last two second of the video in this Sanctuary, being that it showed the logo of the chewing gum company that offered financial assistance to Matt and his colleagues for the making of this testament of human experience. But I am heartened by the fact that this company was able to recognize the impact that testimonies such as these can have. And I believe that it is fitting that a recognition to their contribution stay there, as I feel that it is important to give credit where it is due, and that recognizing awesomeness—wherever it comes from—is part of a spiritual practice; the kind of spiritual practice that Certificates of Awesomeness are all about.

In addition to the technical assistance and the corporate sponsor, the particular Matt video that I showed this morning took 14 months to make, extended travel and editing, as well as a modest, yet significant budget.

Moments of awesomeness do not often require all that level of preparation.

Not too long ago, I paid a visit to Ottawa, to spend with a few friends from there. Over that visit, I was able to catch up with my friends Jon and Sima, who were remodeling their new home in the Hintonburg neighbourhood of Ottawa. For lunch they took me to the new burger joint in the neighbourhood, aptly called the

Hintonburger: a new Ma ‘n’ Pa operation that took over an old KFC restaurant that had gone out of business.

It was there that I spent some long-overdue quality time with these friends, it was there that I found that they were expecting their first child, and it was there that I enjoyed the best burger I can remember. The Ma ‘n’ Pa burger place with the clever pun for a name took it over the top of for me, and at the end of the meal I couldn’t resist to declare—with much solemnity—that those moments had been officially awesome.

My friend Sima took the compliment in kind, but playing along in true Ottawa government employee fashion, she also challenged me to produce the appropriate paperwork to certify such a solemn declaration.

Ever since then, I have made it a habit to carry with me, in my Moleskine agenda, a stack of Certificates of Awesomeness (like the ones in your orders of service) [see below]. Of course, such paperwork isn’t—in and of itself—necessary, but it is one way in which I often bear witness to the awesomeness that others bestow toward me.

Allow me to demonstrate:

This week, I needed technical assistance in setting up the YouTube video presentation for this morning’s Reading. Stan Yack stepped up to offer his knowhow in video-capture, projecting equipment, and logistical assistance. This week, I was pleased to team up with him in, along with other volunteers, in putting this service together. In that spirit, *This certifies, that Stan Yack’s technical assistance, on these 25-28 days of July, of 2014, is officially awesome.* Ah! and there are two witness lines on these certificates—they ensure than not just any random bozo can write these! [Worship Leader Ron joins to witness the Certificate]

[A Certificate of Awesomeness is presented to Stan]

We have many other Certificates of Awesomeness, whether or not they are labeled as such, and they come in many shapes, sizes, sounds, and levels of extravagance: a gift for someone who has hosted us for trip from out of town; an e-mail saying “thanks!”; a “like” on a Facebook post; a postcard; a hug—or a kiss, where appropriate; ...a high five!

All of these can be meaningful spiritual practices, by showing gratitude for the gifts that others have offered, including the ways that they continue to inspire us by their actions, be they simple times of shared company, or sizable enterprises with months of preparation.

Offering certificates of awesomeness is an awareness-enhancing exercise by which we remember how, in the tedium and the tears, in the dullness and the drama, in

the pain and pettiness of our lives, these lives can indeed be awesome, because we make them so for each other.

Above all, the Certificates of Awesomeness that we give each other throughout our lives bear witness to the truth that, in these lives, we all leave something for others;

That we all have the power to impact each other;

To inspire each other;

To leave a legacy of awe during our lifetimes... and beyond.

May we so remain aware of these inspirations.

So may we be awed.

So may we witness.

Alleluia!

Amen

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Certificate of Awesomeness  
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