

Bruce Daniel Biddle has created a life that achieves what so many strive for

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April 6, 2017



Bruce Daniel Biddle with his wife Keiko and their children

Over the years since his graduation from UTS in 1989, Bruce Daniel Biddle has created a life that achieves what so many strive for – balance. On his journey he has successfully managed to interweave a variety of ministries that have allowed him to utilize his unique talents, skills and training developed at UTS as well as at other academic institutions.

A native of Los Angeles, his father’s work moved the family to Ohio, where Bruce was raised along with two other brothers. After joining the Unification Church in 1975, he finished his degree in Art at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. For ten years he worked in businesses doing graphic design and print work for church publications until he was given a scholarship to attend UTS.

“After ten years in the business world I was feeling a little dry spiritually; I felt reborn being at the Seminary.” Biddle especially enjoyed his courses with Professor Kieran Scott, a teacher of religious education who utilized writings of many Catholic authors who were very creative in their thinking. Biddle had been involved in teaching Sunday School while living in the Bay Area and while at UTS he began to see a way to connect his passions of art and education. Explains Bruce, “I saw a chance to use my art degree to help serve; I wanted to find ways to develop more in that area. Many of my projects at UTS involved an artistic orientation; I wanted to create projects that encapsulated the religious imagination.” Biddle’s final project at the seminary was a proposal to create a magazine for church-going children that could be received by mail. This would be a way for children to share stories, artwork, games, regardless of where they were – a real bonus for children in isolated areas of the country or the world.

True to an interfaith orientation, during his years at UTS, Bruce studied both Protestant and Catholic approaches to children’s education. Originally from a Mormon background, Biddle also discovered three books by a Mormon couple, Richard and Linda Eyres who co-authored *Teaching Children Joy*, *Teaching Children Responsibility*, and *Teaching Children Charity*, books Biddle found inspirational regarding the guidance and education of children. The books focused on teaching character through activities aimed at giving children an experience of God and of joy in their family. “These are the essential building blocks for children to create a foundation to be responsible as they reach their teens; eventually they reach a point where they want to give back. I wanted to find a way to create materials with visual impact that conveyed universal values.” Bruce’s vision would eventually lead him to create literature for children and foreshadowed his future vocation.

When he arrived in Cleveland in 1990, with his wife Keiko, Bruce’s background landed him work in a printing company where he made an arrangement that allowed him to use the printing presses on his day off. He used this opportunity to create the Clover Club, a quarterly magazine for children between six and twelve years of age. Bruce cites the children’s magazine “Highlights” as a good model for what he

created. (Now in its 70th anniversary the “Highlights” magazine has been run by the same family since 1946 and has over one million subscribers.)



While working for the print shop and creating the Clover Club, Bruce was simultaneously leading the local church community’s Sunday School and serving as the pastor for the Cleveland, Ohio Unification community of a half-dozen families. In 2000, Bruce found a part-time library job with the Cleveland Public Library where he was encouraged to become the children’s librarian. Fully aware that having a Fine Arts degree and a graduate degree in Religious Education were not likely to be big money makers, and with an expanding family, Bruce diligently worked at his library job and

scheduled his days off to pursue a degree in library science from Kent State University.

Bruce was instrumental in reaching out to ministers from other Christian churches in the Cleveland area. The notion of promoting inter-racial and interfaith activities found a real life expression that was very effective in contributing to harmony in a diverse community.

Bruce’s love of art and the sharing of universal spiritual values were always at the forefront of his approach to ministry. Bruce had purchased bindery equipment and a printing press and found authors who wanted to self-publish. In his work at the library he always had a good children’s book that he would share – sometimes with the ministers - that would illustrate a simple life lesson centered in values.

Bruce emphasizes the importance of children having a foundation in reading before they are swallowed up by the world of electronics. “Children need books and magazines. And they need to be in nature as well as working with their hands, making crafts. These are all a good distraction from electronics. There is too much information in the world kids are living in. As a culture we need to find a way to make a contribution to a healthier culture with art, and stories that touch the heart and focus on the value of building healthy families. I don’t see the technology slowing down, but our role is to focus on the family. Parents need to read with their children, have good picture books available and help kids develop an inner life and a certain emotional stability before they go on to the responsibilities of dealing with the bigger world.”

Although he has some misgivings about the pervasiveness of technology, Bruce appreciates the platform of social media. “I’m grateful for Facebook as I would never have enough time to visit with all my friends or talk on the phone with everyone. But I am fascinated with text and images and the world of possibility presented through books and entertainment.” And true to his balanced orientation in the world, even his Facebook posts demonstrate a thoughtful, reflective approach to life in which he shows respect for many sides of the same debate. He also posts articles and his illustrations as well as the work of other artists.

Despite turbulent times, Bruce remains optimistic. “I’m always searching for ways opposing parties can build consensus. For example evolution versus intelligent design, or the political right and left. We need to find ways to meet the challenge of bringing people together. I am a big proponent of balanced projects – we may need to agree to disagree, but we need to continue to work together so divisions don’t tear us apart – we need to find a middle ground.”

Not surprisingly, librarian Biddle explores literature that addresses his interests in finding ways of bridging divisions and how story-telling reveals who we are as a human family. He is currently reading *The Story Telling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* by Jonathan Gottschall and also delving into Jonathan Haidt’s *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*. Bruce shares that, “Stories are part of our DNA – they relate to religion, family and culture - imagination is how our faith develops and how we reshape our story for the future; as a culture we also need to be looking for a shared core to keep moving forward beyond division.”

Life has not been without challenges. His mother passed away in 2011 from Alzheimer’s and for the past few years Bruce cared for his father, before he recently died. Although he is not certain what the future holds, it is likely to utilize his artistic talents in concert with his wife, Keiko, who hails from Japan and has a background in cartooning. “I am so amazingly grateful to have returned to my hometown and to have been able to establish a variety of interfaith activities. I have four wonderful kids, my wife, Keiko, who is my anchor, and have had many job opportunities. I am grateful for the wonderful friends I made at UTS – there is a natural kinship there. And God has really opened so many doors for me.” For Bruce Daniel Biddle, there are many chapters in life yet to be written.

Bruce Daniel Biddle lives with his wife Keiko in Cleveland, Ohio. He is the Art Librarian in the Fine Arts and Special Collections of the Cleveland Public Library.