



Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

7 February, Martin Horlacher, "The Power and the Passion"

We all want to break free, we all want to *live*. But it's never that easy...but even so, don't give up!

14 February, Helen Whatmough, "Saint Valentine"

Valentine's Day – facts and fables from Roman times to modern times; Western world to Asia and the middle East.

21 February, Jan Tendys, "Catherine Helen Spence - A Unitarian High Achiever".

Unitarians are known for their practical responses to the need for social justice as much as for their progressive theology. Both these aspects of our faith played a role in the life of this outstanding Australian.

28 February, Rev. Geoff Usher, "Ten Characteristics of Religious Maturity" Part 1.

Mature religion grows with out increasing knowledge of the world. It is willing to accept today's truth, even though this means giving up the cherished comfortable truths of yesterday. Mature religion is vitally interested in the world around it, and in improving that world. This mini-series of two services will consider what a truly mature religious position might be like.

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**Common Dreams News**

The fourth Common Dreams Conference will be held in Brisbane at Somerville House over 16 – 19 September 2016. The theme of the conference will be "Progressive Spirituality: New Directions". The program will take participants through a broad spectrum of topics exploring what it means to be "spiritual" in contemporary times. <http://www.commondreams.org.au/index.php/news>

Eminent international writers, researchers and scholars Dr Diana Butler Bass and Professor Pamela Eisenbaum and well known Australian theologian Dr Val Webb will deliver major public addresses and they will also participate in other parts of the program. Rev Dr David Felten, Co-founder of Living the Questions and an acclaimed speaker at the third Common Dreams Conference in 2013, will also feature. A strong team of Australian and New Zealand speakers will present keynote addresses, lectures and workshops.

During part of the conference there will be a parallel program for "young" people

## **‘American Thanksgiving’, Insights and background**

In the early 1600s a group of English worshippers objected to the popish ways with which the church of England worshiped, and wanted to separate from the Church of England. Many were from the north of England. They called themselves “separatists”. Today they are called Puritans.

These Separatists believed in: predestination, only used the Calvinistically edited Bible, and only acknowledged two sacraments: baptism at birth and communion. Marriage was considered a state matter, not a religious matter, though men were encouraged to marry. One most critical of the Church of England ways of worship was a preacher called Brewster, who was of course highly threatening to the Church officials, and the Archbishop of York wanted him arrested. This group of separatists were able to migrate to Holland where they were free to worship as they saw fit. First they went to Amsterdam, then on to Leiden.

It didn’t take them long to realise that moving to Leiden had its drawbacks. Firstly The Archbishop of York had sent people from England to arrest Brewster and bring him back to England for trial; fortunately for Brewster, he was able to escape into hiding before this eventuated. Furthermore, the Separatists found their children beginning to speak Dutch, and take on Dutch ways, even some of their sons signing up for the Dutch army. The Dutch way of life didn’t suit them. It became hard for them to make a living. They were basically agrarians who lived off the land and they were a people living in a trading centre. So they decided that moving to “the new world” was their only option.

They did not want to move to Jamestown in Virginia, where an English colony had begun, because they did not want to be beholden to English law. They did not want to go to New Amsterdam (now New York) because living under the Dutch did not suit them either. So they made an agreement with the English government to start their own colony in northern Virginia.

Moving to the New World in 1620 was about

as risky as travelling to the space module now - and therefore it was expensive. To get a crew that would navigate to this area was difficult, and it all took money. They were able to negotiate with a loan company to borrow over 2000 pounds to finance their trip. They returned to the Plymouth area of England where they were to embark on their new adventure. They had planned to depart in early spring of 1620 but problems with the finance company delayed their departure several times. Finally two ships, the “Speedwell” and the “Mayflower” were to depart in August. 90 settlers were to travel on the “Mayflower” and 30 on the “Speedwell”. However after departure the “Speedwell” quickly did not live up to its name, began taking on water and both ships had to return for the “Speedwell” to have repairs. This happened two times, so finally it was agreed they’d dump the “Speedwell”. More passengers crowded onto the “Mayflower”, and some just gave up on the journey. It was well into September when the journey finally got underway from Plymouth - and at the last minute Brewster came aboard safe and sound still uncaught by English authorities.

Many Separatist men decided that the weaker female bodies would not fare well on the trip, so many left their daughters and wives back in England who joined them three years later. This included the daughters of Preacher Brewster, Patience and Fear, but he did take his sons, Wrestle and Love. However three women in their third trimester of pregnancy did join the “Mayflower”, and the children Oceanus and Resolved were born on the voyage.

Upon departure there were 102 passengers, only half of whom were actual separatists. They had hired a Captain John Carver to be their military protector, rather like a mercenary, and some of his men. These were called “the others”. Indentured to Captain Carver was one John Howland, suspected to be his kin, who signed on to be his servant and assistant for seven years aged about 21 years.

Due to their late departure, the “Mayflower” hit massive hurricane activity on the Atlantic - actually not unlike what happened last month

with Hurricane Joaquin. The tiny ship, already crowded with people below deck in layers they couldn't stand up in, were tossed and tossed. The space they had to live in was 52'x 24'. As the ship hit the water the boards opened up and calking fell out, so soon they were all covered in water, freezing and miserable. They hung a grappling hook overboard to try to steady the ship. In the rough crossing one member of the crew and one passenger died from disease. There was one more who almost died, the same aforementioned John Howland, indentured servant to Captain Carver. He went up on to deck for some fresh air and was swept into the sea in no time. He was plunged 20 feet down into the depths but he managed to grab the grappling hook and was hauled back on board.

After this rough crossing, the "Mayflower" was unable to get to the pre-planned spot due to extreme weather, so they entered the protected waters inside a large cape, now known as Cape Cod. They reconstructed a small boat and rowed ashore. They found no people but they did find a native burial site and took some corn from it to eat. Then they feared they would be resented for this and moved on to another spot, which they named Plymouth Rock, where modern Plymouth Massachusetts is today. Knowing that they were moving to a new place illegally, not under any auspices of a country, they formed their own pact to become a legal body, or government, as it were, and agreed to negotiate their landing with the local people. This "Mayflower" Pact was signed by 45 men representing their households. Unfortunately they did not see anyone around with which to negotiate.

The reason they saw no one for quite some time is that 90% of the local native population of New England had been wiped out by a terrible plague, caused by the introduction of leptospirosis, a disease my vet friend Bill tells me is fatal to both animals and humans, and possibly spread from rats and their urine into the local water system. The contact the natives had had previously with white men fishing on the fertile fishing fields off the east coast, or trading in furs had probably brought this. So, when the "Mayflower" settlers ar-

rived, they happened to pick a place where the local tribe had simply died out, but the fields were still cleared from the surrounding dense woods.

By this time it is late November 1620 and the winter that had set in that year was a bitter one - probably not unlike the one the Bostonians told us about last year with 9' of snow at one point. There was no option but for the "Mayflower" settlers to stay on the ship through the winter. On fine days the men would go ashore, set up defensive mounds and prepare the beginnings of a village. However the "weaker" women and children were forced to remain on board where disease raged through them rapidly. When spring came more men were in the area working when suddenly a chief of a neighbouring tribe, named Massasoit, took advantage of the situation, marched right into the camp and declared, "welcome Englishmen!" Probably words he'd regret for the rest of his life! The settlers were able to make pact with the natives that they form a village on that land.

The natives were able to teach the settlers how to grow corn the way they did, and shared their seed with them generously. The general method for natives to grow corn was to plant a seed perhaps with a dead fish for fertiliser. They were farther apart than you see in corn fields today. When the corn was about a foot high they'd plant beans near the corn. As the corn grew, the beans had a pole to climb up, and they produced nitrogen that aided the roots of the corn. Once the beans were climbing the corn, squash or pumpkin was planted around that. This would cover the ground. The big leaves would put shade on the ground reducing weeds and keeping in water. The pilgrims also brought wheat, barley and peas, among other things, to plant themselves. They did not bring beasts of burden to assist them. So the first season's crop involved a lot of HARD WORK.

The natives also taught the settlers how to hunt wild turkey and other game, fish the streams, and how to harvest the nutritious native cranberries and other berries that grew there.

The settlers made their huts out of dab and wattle. They were not much bigger than twice the size of Thoreau's hut. At first they had thatched roofs, but these made the homes prone to burning down from fire embers, so eventually only board siding was used on the roofs. You can see replicas today at a place called Plimouth, inland from modern day Plymouth. It is sort of the Old Sydney Town of Plymouth, and very interesting.

Unfortunately, the long winter living aboard the "Mayflower" took its toll on the settler population, particularly the women and children. In one year half of its population died from disease. By spring 75% of the women, confined to the ship, had died of disease, leaving only 6 adult females alive. 50% of the men had died, 36% of the boys had died and 18% or 2 girls had died. In April 1621 Captain Carver walked out of a cornfield, collapsed from sun stroke and soon thereafter died. His wife died soon thereafter, and all of their children had died. Suddenly his indentured servant, John Howland, had his debt to the Carver family erased and he was head of the remaining Carver household - included were a male and female servant, as well as the 14 year old orphan Elizabeth, daughter of Mr and Mrs Tilley who died in that dreadful year, and another orphaned teenaged girl named Desire. John Howland was granted an acre for each member of that household and became responsible for the welfare of the household, though all were unrelated.

So, after a year's hard work, and losing half their ranks, the settlers were left with just over 50 members, including only 4 adult females to care for all the children and men. They worked hard the first summer, building their huts to live in, growing their crops etc. Their harvest was bountiful. It was decided that they would have a 3 day feast along with 90 male natives in October.

They cooked the local wild turkey much as they cooked a roasted chicken back in England. The natives brought 4 deer to add to the feast. They made a sauce from honey and native cranberries. They used corn meal to make a bread not unlike a farmer's soda bread. They used yellow squash or pumpkin

cooked and mashed, and added it with spices to make a pumpkin pie. In addition they probably shared in unlimited fish and shell fish, plentiful in those regions. So that was the first Thanksgiving meal.

Thanksgiving was not an official annual holiday in the US until Abraham Lincoln declared the last Thursday in November to be a Thanksgiving holiday. Later Roosevelt changed it to the fourth Thursday of the month so as not to interfere with Christmas shopping.

Thanksgiving has come to mean many things to Americans. It's a time for the family to get together and rejoice in their bounty. It's always the day of a big football game. It's the start of a four day holiday for kids from school. It's the time that kids gone off to college often return to tell (or not tell) their stories of college life. It's the day before the big pre-Christmas sales and the launch of the official Christmas shopping period. But most of all it is a family time without the material spew that Christmas has become. That's probably why most Americans declare Thanksgiving to be their favourite holiday.

Now the Pilgrim Settlers had a lot to be thankful for. That they survived at all was something to be thankful for! They were later joined by other settlers and their community grew. In 1623 another ship delivered many wives and daughters of original Pilgrim male settlers, as well as more Pilgrims to join their ranks.

The Plymouth colony still had a 10 year commitment to pay off their loan to the loan company, but in the end the aforementioned John Howland took it over with four of his friends, paid off over 3000 pounds in exchange for exclusive rights to the fur trade for six years. This proved very lucrative for all concerned.

John Howland explored upper regions now known as Maine in the fur trading business. He managed to live on for over 50 years too, into his 80's, dying in 1672. He married the orphaned girl Elizabeth Tilley in his household eventually, and between them they had 10 offspring. There were 6 daughters and 4 sons. All but one daughter had large fami-

-lies, and so in no time Mr and Mrs Howland had 75 grandchildren. Elizabeth, being 15 years junior to her husband, also lived to her 80's dying in 1686. And through the eldest of their sons, John Junior, I can claim them as my ancestors.

Every Thanksgiving till I was 12 our great grandmother bragged about our relation on the "Mayflower" who fell overboard and was saved. I doubt if she knew his nick-name among his peers was "lusty John Howland"! I realise now that the "Lusty" described his enthusiasm for hard work and enterprise, but I doubt Great grandmother still would have approved! I have met by chance 2 other descendants of that man and woman too. Given the number of grandchildren they had, this is not surprising! Other descendants of John and Elizabeth Howland include: George Bush, Richard Nixon, Sarah Palen, Gerald Ford, for a nice Republican line up, as well as Joseph Smith Jr, founder of the Mormons and many more.

It was only in recent years that I also learned that another member of the Pilgrims was an ancestor of my mother's, through her father's mother. That family was, not surprisingly, devout Congregationalists, the protestant denomination that the Puritans evolved into.

Of the 50 or so original settlers, there are at least a quarter of a million Americans today than can honestly claim to be descendants of this brave band of separatists, our Pilgrim Forefathers. So Thanksgiving also has a meaning for all Americans about the bravery of this small group of people who set out to worship as they pleased in the New World, and who survived against great odds. And that was the beginning of what it means to be American.

Now what can we as Unitarians learn from this "holiday"? Well, holidays are really meant to be "holy days" which the Pilgrims would not have approved of, since they didn't believe in saints. However, to hold with respect the achievements of early settlers, and to demonstrate some gratitude in our current bounty are two things we in countries of immigrants could benefit highly from.

I guess on Australia Day we do recognise Capt. Phillip's band of first settlers, and after recently reading a book by Ron Rundle on the First Fleet, it was just as amazing that the first fleet arrived in Sydney Cove pretty well in tact and healthy. The First Fleet's attrition rate was far more of an achievement than we realise (and certainly better than the Pilgrims!) The bravery at setting out to a new land of which little was known is indeed something worth honouring - even though the convicts didn't have much say in the matter. Nonetheless it was the beginning of the country in which we now enjoy a good life-style, and acknowledging those early settlers is or should be part of our national psyche.

But universally, I think that we all need to take stock, and reflect on our many bounties. We all work hard. The frenzy of modern life is fuelled by the constant desire for more - more stuff, better position in society, and for more success. All this striving makes for an achievement based society, and often an healthy economy. But I think it is important to nurture our spiritual side both as individuals and as a society. Taking stock and reflecting on our blessings is a useful tool in developing our spirits allowing us to become whole, spiritually nourished people. Without such nourishment really what hope has society got in the long-run?

***Presented by Virginia Hastings on 15th November, 2015.***

**"The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth" By Jennie A. Brownscombe (Wikipedia)**



## **A New Year's Tale.**

*Caz Donnelly*

It dawned a hot New Year's Eve in Rural Arcadia. Peter had offered to do some roof repairs at a friend's home in Epping so needed my Ford station wagon (the work horse) to load up with ladders, tools etc. However our daughter, Karen, needed a lift to meet up with friends who were attending a Bush "Bachelors & Spinners Ball" weekend out west. I had the pleasure of driving her through Galston Gorge in Peter's car the BMW 7 series, much loved by him even to obsession. Referred to as "Dad's Baby", it wasn't new but it was much cherished!

All went well until midway through the gorge the flashing light drew my attention to "check coolant" which I intended to do once I could properly pull over, but when steam emerged from the front engine I found a place to pull up pronto! A caring local friend from behind pulled up, arranged to continue with the chauffeuring of Karen, and so the NRMA was called! On arrival, the service man fearing the worst (a cracked head) suggested that I should "leave the country" and he would tow the BM home! I took the home option!

In fear and trepidation I phoned the residence where Peter was working to find that he was not there, but up at the Dr's surgery having stitches for an accident sustained on the job, so requested that it was best that my phone call did not appear to take place! Ultimately he returned home, not at all impressed by my news and took to the couch to ease the pain of both occurrences. I took to the overgrown vegie patch, outside pulling out weeds, plants, furiously, until it was time to attend a neighbour's home for New Year's Eve drinks!

The husband had recently endured a gruelling melanoma removal and skin graft, on the leg, (and not sure even of his future prognosis.) So the two men kept company elevating their respective limbs for the evening on the coffee table. It did put things in perspective, that no matter what traumas, trials or tribulations beset us there will always be some one with worse troubles!

So may it be for you all in 2016!

## **Movie Review**

*Ginna Hastings*

Max and I recently viewed the film "Bridge of Spies" starring Tom Hanks and directed by Stephen Spielberg, written by the Cohen Brothers. As you might expect from such a sterling cast it was a most captivating film. It is the story of Gary Powers who was shot down in a spying US U2 plane in 1960 over Russia. (I remember this myself, as I was 12 at the time). Eventually he was traded for a Russian spy on a snow covered bridge in Berlin.

It puts squarely on the screen the fears of communism in the post McCarthy era in the USA (reminding me of fear of Muslims today) as well as the issue of human rights as set down in the US Constitution. It is full of suspension as Hanks, who plays the lawyer defending the Russian spy, not only defends him in court, but also brokers the trade deal in a very complicated situation while trying to keep his head squarely on what is right. It presents issues that we, as Unitarians, need to be mindful of in the workings of a democracy. Also the man who plays the spy comes up with some great lines that truly tickled my fancy!

## **ANZAC Centenary**

*Ginna Hastings*

This morning I took my grandchildren (ages 5 and 9) to the travelling ANZAC Centenary exhibition at Wollongong University. It was free and is travelling around Australia to various "country" centres. Upon entering we were given a digital device that locked into what was being played in each room by itself. There were members of various armed forces present helping out.

It was a really good exhibition. It could affect anyone, no matter what age, at their level. Firstly it had films and photos of what was "new" in that time, the fashions, what people did for recreation and what major Australian cities were like. 14% of Australians worked on the land then. Then the beginnings of World War 1 were explained, which in today's terms sound pretty silly; a little diplomacy could have got us out of it right away.



The enthusiasm of the young Diggers going off to war was shown in reproduced pictures. in photos, films and sounds. Cheering crowds saw our first recruits off proudly. It showed photos of our ANZACS in Egypt, sitting all over a pyramid. You could scroll to each man and it would show their name. Some people were seeking ancestors. Next the horror of Gallipoli was demonstrated in graphic photos, pictures, movies and sounds. The losses were so massive and so fast! Next it went on to describe the trenches in Europe. Not a tree stood. The sounds of bombs and gunfire seemed ceaseless, just in the few minutes we were there. Photos of the trenches showed Diggers in mud almost to their knees, where they lived and fought for months and months in rain, massive amounts of mud, summer heat and winter snow.

What touched me deeply was a tin roof that had been covered in two feet of soil meant to protect the men from gunfire. It was more like a carrot grater for all the holes in it! Another graphic photo showed a donkey in mud up to its thighs struggling to move a cannon. One could easily understand shell shock there.

The final war room showed the Aussie light brigade in Northern Africa proudly mounted on their horses, and described how boldly they fought despite being outnumbered. The final room showed old photos of Diggers who fell in that horrendous war. Quite a few were noted by name and coming from the Wollongong area. Young, fresh faces, hopeful lives crashed down in appalling conditions. Finally it described the ravishes of the Spanish Flu that killed even more people than the whole war! At the very end were huge letters spelling out ANZAC covered in knitted and hand made red poppies since 2013. Honestly it was incredibly touching; I left with a very large lump in my throat!

On the way home we discussed the pros and cons of war. We concluded that war solves nothing but sometimes we have to defend



ourselves from nonsensical aggressors. It was an excellent experience for all of us. I highly recommend the experience to others!

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Book Review: "Train to Pakistan"

Jan Tendys

When Khushwant Singh wrote "Train to Pakistan" in 1956, the events of the summer of 1947 were still vivid in his mind. Although he lived most of his life in India, Singh (1915-2014) was born in a village which ended up on the Pakistan side of the border as the British Raj was divided into the nations of Pakistan and India. He lived through the communal violence leading to colossal loss of life that accompanied that division. He said that he wrote this documentary novel to expiate the guilt he felt at having been unable to do anything to stop the bloodshed going on around him.

The reader is introduced to the peaceful village of Mano Majra, close to the newly created border, on the Indian side. Sikhs and Muslims, the principal communities, have lived in remarkable harmony over many years. Their daily life is marked by the sounds of trains coming and going from the nearby railway station.

However in that 1947 summer, refugees are flowing in both directions between Pakistan and India seeking safety but subject to attacks from fanatics of all kinds. A train arrives from Pakistan laden with corpses. Mano Majra will not escape violence. The first step is the expulsion of the local Muslims.

The interest of the book lies in just how the good communal relations of the village break down. Demagoguery is part of it, the cowardice of authorities another. Each of the principal characters has a decision to make with respect to his own part. A murderous revenge attack is planned against a train carrying Muslims to Pakistan. Can nobody stop it?

This novel is not without relevance to our own times.

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## New Kiva Loan

Meet 37-year-old Amani from Ramallah. She is married with four kids. Three years ago, Amani started her business by buying a small sewing shop with one sewing machine and no employees. But now she has two full-time employees.

The main challenges to Amani's business are competitors in the marketplace and currency fluctuation. Amani requires this loan to add another new sewing machine to her store as well as purchase some sewing materials.

Amani hopes that the extra income from this loan will help her improve her standard of living. In the future, she plans to expand and improve her business. She thanks you for your support.

(Written by Kiva partner in Ramallah).

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### *Classic*

On his death bed they asked Bob Hope where he wanted to be buried.

His answer was, "Surprise me."

## Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship?

**Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.** Full membership \$50, concession \$20 . If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org) . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher for an application form at the Sunday service.

***If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for Esprit.*** It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: [jtendys@bigpond.com](mailto:jtendys@bigpond.com) or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

Although we have an Associate Minister, Rev. Geoff Usher, we are primarily a lay-led congregation. **Perhaps you have a topic to share?** We welcome any topic ideas, offers to speak or names of suitable speakers for our meetings whom we could approach. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service.*

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**