



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
(near Milsons Point Station)

Tel: **0466 940 461**

Website: www.sydneyunitarians.org

Editor: Jan Tendys

Volume **9** Issue **4**

April, 2013

Schedule of Services

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

7 April **Laurence Gormley** **“Observations from my recent trip to Myanmar (Burma).”**

Myanmar has been in the news a lot recently because of the dramatic political changes taking place. Some observations and thoughts from my recent trip there. More subjective than a definitive study of the country and limited by the places and time of the visit. Hopefully still interesting.

14 April **Dr. Max Lawson** **“Rudyard Kipling and World Religions”**

Often described as a mindless imperialist and racist, Rudyard Kipling was in fact an astute observer of Indian life and religion in India and Tibet. Discussion of Kipling’s novel Kim (1901) will be used as a springboard to discuss differing attitudes to world religions.

21 April **Morandir Armson** **“Imagined Deities”**

Faith would seem to be an important element in religious belief and practice. But can one have faith in something that one knows to be false? This talk will focus on the phenomenon of imaginary religions; those religions which revere fictional, imaginary or post-modern deities. From Jedi-ism and Discordianism, to the Church of the SubGenius, the Church of Ponies, and the Cthulhu Cult, this presentation will shine a light on those who believe in believing”.

28 April **Rev. Dr. Ian Ellis-Jones** **“Walking in the Eternal Now”**

‘What is the Path? What is Truth?’ asked the disciple. ‘Walk on!’ said the Zen master. Ian will talk about how we can be set free, unconditionally and absolutely.

5 May **Martin Horlacher** **"Atheists, Theists, Foxholes and Fundamentalisms."**

The place of faith, religion and secularism in today's world is a difficult topic, and a very hot one. Are all spiritual and religious people essentially deluded? Or are there really, as some would say, no atheists in foxholes? And is agnosticism a tenable position? This talk will ask all of these questions, and, to the greatest extent possible, answer them.

Living with “IT”

Hi, I’m Ginna Hastings, and I’m a member of Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship in Kirribilli, Sydney. I’m writing this for all my Unitarian friends, met or unmet, to tell you a story. Why? Well, aren’t we all a part of the interdependent web of life?

I have a secret many of you don’t know about. I was born without the lower part of a leg. Just “one of those things.” I walk well with my prosthetic leg, but sometimes it slows me down. It’s hard getting into taxis, for example, or stairs are challenging, and running is almost out of the question. Most adults who know find it easy to make concessions. But growing up with this weirdness wasn’t easy. You know kids... their fear of the weird makes them tease those who are different, and boy did I cop it! They thought I was just trying to get out of PE, which I hated anyway! The worse days were when I was between prosthetics or my leg was sore, and I had to use crutches. Friends deliberately ran away and I spent time playing jacks alone with myself many a playtime. So I have scars inside and out from this deformity.

Now I’m going to make a confession (even though we are Unitarians!). I just lied through my teeth! I have two perfectly fine legs – which two knee replacements have made so. My problem isn’t my legs, **it’s my brain.** You can’t see it, but I’m missing something in my brain. Doctors haven’t exactly nailed it, but it’s some missing balance of brain chemistry. It’s not my fault and I can’t control it, though I wish I could!

Sometimes I’m totally alive, enthusiastic, energetic and wonderful. Sometimes I’m “over the top” and scare the *!#! out of people. Some people find this off-putting! During these times I get heaps done physically. I have unlimited stamina and perseverance, and need little sleep. I talk very fast and ideas come into my head like ducks in a shooting gallery. I used to think I was “supposed” to be like this all the time! Other times I shoot off my mouth without thinking.

Then there are those times when I’m down. Blue as blue can be. Sometimes I’m so depressed I can hardly get out of bed. I let things go and couldn’t care less. Other times I just have a sort of a malaise about me

– like riding a bicycle on flat tyres. No bounce at all in me, and every bump seems exaggerated.

I soon realized that some people avoided me. I was “unpredictable”, “volatile”, “had weird ideas”, and not really a person conservative people felt comfortable around. My true friends stuck by me, and I am so grateful for the handful of wonderful people who love me no matter what!

It must’ve been hard on my kids too, never quite knowing what sort of mother I’d be. Was I going to be angry, down, or flying around like the flying nun? My poor family!! Yes, living with me must’ve been confusing for my kids!

For the longest time I thought something was really wrong with ME. My emotions were extreme, even from childhood. People used to tell me “you’re too sensitive!” My dad was fond of telling me why I shouldn’t feel like I did because of all kinds of logical reasons. Logic didn’t come into it! I never quite knew how I was going to feel in a situation, and his explanations only served to lower my self-esteem. I just knew I was easily hurt, and hated myself. My self-esteem easily took a battering, and boy was it low.

I guess you’ve figured out by now I’m bipolar. In my case it’s type 2, which means I don’t get so manic I do totally crazy things or get psychotic, but depression is an old “friend.”

When I finally got diagnosed, in a suicidal moment in 2003, at aged 55, **I was just so relieved.** I’d seen scores of shrinks since I was 18, but they couldn’t label me just right. Lithium (the most common drug for bipolar) hadn’t helped a bit. Antidepressants helped the depression, but then the highs came more often and I was definitely cycling rapidly.

Then the DSM got updated with the type 2 bipolar and bingo I had a real life label. **It wasn’t my fault.** I was just born with it! My soul wasn’t tainted. It wasn’t my original sin or my low self-esteem. It wasn’t my childhood problems, though I do think they contributed. It just is, and that’s that! I call it: “it”.

Now I’m on the right medication that helps, but not always. I still seem to have down times twice a year, one minor one major. The latter is usually in late Nov. It’s

not the seasons or Christmas, it's just my cycle. It happened in the northern hemisphere the same. But now with medication my over-active brain calms down, evens out, for the most part. I'm better organized, my memory is better (although one side effect of my medication is difficulty remembering "just" the noun I want while speaking), and the real Ginna is there out front far more often. People I've met recently don't know anything is different about me.

But I'm not out of the woods by any means. In fact last December I had a spell in psychiatric hospital for depression. This year the general dip was deeper and longer than usual. Long story short, my meds needed adjusting, and it was a bad year in events last year. Also I learned through research that regular drinking, even in the "safe range" isn't safe for me. I'm now practically a tea totaller. (I've heard that alcoholism can be a side effect of bipolar). Too much stress can exacerbate things, I've learned. I usually keep more to myself when I'm down and don't let people know for a long time – my defensive pattern.

So, through all this existence of mine I have learned a few things. Be careful about what I take on. Ask for help when I need it. If socializing is too hard, it's okay not to go. I have to look for the signs of being sub-manic and calm myself down, pace myself, and make sure I get enough sleep, but use the energy to do constructive things. If I get down I have to make sure I do the basics – like the dishes and laundry and tidying up the house, just to feel I'm still in charge of my life.

Though I have had moments of being very suicidal, I met a friend in recent years whose very bipolar father committed suicide after dropping her off at Sunday school. She suffered immensely from this her entire life. It was at this time that I pledged to myself that no matter how down I got, I could NOT commit suicide because of the damage it would do to my loved ones. I also have to keep telling myself, "This too will pass!!" and hang on for healthier days. Fortunately I don't go through these dark days much these days.

I have those who understand in my life, from whom I can ask for help. If I need to isolate myself awhile they understand too.

But my true friends know when I need company and come over for a treasured cuppa. (Unitarian communion I call it!)

Sometimes I explain my situation to others I've recently come to know and sometimes I don't want to. I don't have to either. I'm not ashamed of my label or ME – and I've accepted it. What I accomplish in life is still my accomplishment, but I don't have to set the world on fire any more. Just living a relatively normal life is my victory over this disease, and I'm proud that, for the most part, I do.

It's not always easy for my family, and I honour them for sticking by me! My friends too. I've lost a few friends because they couldn't cope with me. Oh well, their problem!

I don't know all the statistics, but I'd be certain **that no matter how many people are in your Unitarian congregation there's at least one person with bipolar disorder**, either the more extreme type 1 or my type 2 which is more subtle and less often diagnosed. It's not just about moodiness. It's about an over active brain at times – either negatively or positively.

There are many great web sites that give information about bipolar disorder. According to the Sydney Morning Herald on Feb 17, 2012 bipolar disorder is 80% caused by heredity. (I have two second cousins, one on each side of my family, who are worse off than me.) 10% may suicide, particularly if untreated. Though there is no "cure" it can usually be controlled with appropriate medication and therapy and family support. Indeed, 9 out of 10 of those who do seek and follow help routines are satisfied with their progress.

The big problem is getting people to realize they DO have a problem, and that they need to persevere with treatment. Also, when people are in a manic state they think they are in a great state, and resist taking medication – up to half of sufferers! They may even get to a psychotic stage and require emergency hospitalization. Bipolar is real and serious, but it can be controlled, usually well. It is estimated that 1.39% of Australians have bipolar disorder. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). This could mean up to a quarter of a million people. You've probably seen fewer albinos

than people with bipolar disorder.

There are some modern famous people who admit to having bipolar disorder. These include Catherine Zeta Jones, Stephen Fry, and Carrie Fisher. There is speculation that many famous musicians and artists had it as well, like Van Gogh.

So when you run across someone who baffles you, don't treat him or her as some weirdo, as an "other". They might be bipolar. **But they are people too.** They might have something wonderful to add to your life and community if you are willing to show some compassion and patience. They, too, need love and acceptance.

We're all part of the interdependent web of life, and that includes people with mental illness. People with bipolar disorder can add a lot to your Unitarian community too!

I hope my story has enlightened you in some way. Thanks for "listening"!

Ginna Hastings

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**Just who is it telling governments around the world to end fossil fuels?**

***The International Monetary Fund.***

***The International Energy Agency.***

***The World Bank.***

***The United Nations.***

***2011 Global Investor Statement on Climate change.***

***The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.***

***Cheeky kids.***

***Our next biennial ANZUUA Conference 2013***

Hosted by the Auckland Unitarian Church.

The theme of the conference is "A free and responsible search for truth and meaning". The conference begins Saturday morning 26 October and goes through to Monday mid day 28 October.

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Kiva Loan

The latest Kiva loan in which the Fellowship is participating is to David in Kenya. David is a court clerk and adds to his salary with a charcoal selling business. The loan will enable him to buy more stock and pay for school fees for his children..

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***Something to cheer about***

"The United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on Tuesday to approve the first-ever treaty to regulate the enormous global trade in conventional weapons, for the first time linking such sales to the human-rights records of the buyers.

.....  
The treaty would require states exporting conventional weapons to develop criteria that would link exports to avoiding human rights abuses, terrorism and organized crime. It would also ban shipments if they were deemed harmful to women and children. Countries that join the treaty would have to report publicly on sales every year, exposing the process to levels of transparency that rights groups hope will severely limit illicit weapons deals"

The above comes from The New York Times, April 2.

It is a wonderful result for those UN personnel, NGOs and their supporters who have worked for an end to the worst arms deals for many years. It remains to be seen how it will work out in practice, but this is a great step along the way of limiting this colossal trade in death. **JT**

## Worth a Letter

Primary Ethics is the provider for ethics classes in primary schools.

The Federal government has rejected Primary Ethics' application for Deductible Gift Recipient status. So all donations to Primary Ethics will continue to be taxed, and Primary Ethics loses a significant potential source of funding.

Primary Ethics cannot continue without funding, and ethics classes will not continue without Primary Ethics. If they cannot go on, children in NSW public schools will go back to navel-gazing during the weekly Scripture period.

Meanwhile of course, the churches who offer Scripture DO have Deductible Gift Recipient status (see attached list).

Who is responsible for this? Assistant Treasurer David Bradbury. Who is his boss? Julia Gillard. Write to them both and have your say.

The above is from <http://parents4ethics.org/>  
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After a recent state government inquiry into ethics classes, the O'Farrell government affirmed the right of ethics classes to continue to be taught as an alternative to scripture but resisted calls from the Greens to lobby the federal government for DGR status.

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In his letter, the Assistant Treasurer, David Bradbury, said he did not believe there were sufficient reasons for ethics classes to get the tax concession.

"I have looked at whether Primary Ethics is providing a unique and broad public benefit which is sufficient to warrant the philanthropic tax concession relative to the needs of other taxpayers," he wrote. "On balance I do not consider that there are sufficient exceptional circumstances to warrant the listing of Primary Ethics Ltd as a DGR."

***The above is part of an article "Ethics classes at risk as plea for tax relief refused", that appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald March 2, 2013 written by Josephine Tovey***

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/ethics-classes-at-risk-as-plea-for-tax-relief-refused-20130301-2fbj7.html>

### **If you feel this situation is worthy of a protest letter:**

Send a letter to SMH [letters@smh.com.au](mailto:letters@smh.com.au)

Contact PM Julia Gillard: <http://www.pm.gov.au/contact-your-pm>

Contact The Hon. David Bradbury MP

to ask for Primary Ethics DGR status to be revised.

Postal address

PO Box 6022

House of Representatives

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

or

PO Box 712

Penrith, NSW, 2750

Email [aph.gov.au/D\\_Bradbury\\_MP](mailto:aph.gov.au/D_Bradbury_MP)

<http://www.davidbradbury.com.au/contact/>

Contact The Hon Barry O'Farrell MP, Premier NSW To ask him to lobby David Bradbury (above) to revise DGR status of Primary Ethics

Postal address

The Hon. Barry O'Farrell, MP

GPO Box 5341

SYDNEY NSW 2001

Email [office@premier.nsw.gov.au](mailto:office@premier.nsw.gov.au)  
.....

Donate to Primary Ethics : [http://](http://www.primaryethics.com.au/donate.html)

[www.primaryethics.com.au/donate.html](http://www.primaryethics.com.au/donate.html)

Sponsor an Ethics Class topic: [http://](http://www.primaryethics.com.au/sponsor.html)

[www.primaryethics.com.au/sponsor.html](http://www.primaryethics.com.au/sponsor.html)  
.....

### **President's letter to Sydney Morning Herald**

A former Premier fined \$21.6 million for unethical business dealings, our present Premier unwilling to release details of Packer's casino deal (why?), and ICAC investigation into Obeid and MacDonald bring one word to mind: ethics. The federal government has denied the organization that supplies ethics training in NSW government schools tax deductible status, and Barry O'Farrell says they must raise their own money to support themselves. This essentially kills ethics training for non scripture students. Just what some desire. The cost of Nick Greiner's office on Macquarie St. paid for by NSW tax payers would go a long way towards righting this wrong. Which brings us back to one word: ethics. Were it ever thus! (All facts taken from one copy of SMH!)

## Eternal Interests

*Jan Tendys*

“It is a narrow policy to suppose that this country or that is to be marked out as the eternal ally or the perpetual enemy of England. We have no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies - our interests are eternal and those interests it is our duty to follow.” So said Lord Palmerston, long lived participant in nineteenth century British parliaments.

The French have been known to call England “perfidious Albion” and Palmerston would seem to agree with them. Are there any countries, however, which are any better as regards putting their “eternal interests” above friendship or above any kind of moral principle?

**Isn't it true that the whole of international relations is an area virtually void of ethics?**

Before we get carried away with cynicism here, we might look at how the world scene has improved since Palmerston's day. We have a moderately successful world organization in the United Nations, after a false start at international cooperation under the League of Nations. The various subsidiary UN organizations (WHO, FAO etc) are acknowledged to do good work. The UN Charter and the relevant International Covenants embody a concept of Human Rights which cannot be dismissed as “mere idealism”. We need ideals even if we usually don't reach them and even if we can't always agree as to how they might apply.

**The founder of Doctors Without Borders, Bernard Kouchner, who supported the UN intervention in Kosovo, was so horrified with the terrible violations of Human Rights under Saddam Hussein that he backed international pressure to remove him (although he did not endorse the form which the Iraq War took). He saw removal of Hussein as fulfillment of the pledge “never again” that inspired the founding of the UN after the defeat of the Axis powers. No doubt there were others supporting the “coalition of the willing” who were similarly motivated, but few of us would discount the desire of that coalition to have influence over a major oil producing nation, given the “peak oil” beliefs of the time and the fact that shale oil was only**

in the wings. Colin Powell probably believed in the weapons of mass destruction theory as may have Bush himself, though it appears at least a faction in the CIA did not. Blair and Howard, in my judgment, were largely motivated by a desire to stick with the Americans.

**My point is, however, that there was a mixture of motives at play.**

You can probably always discern selfish motives. American novelist John Dos Passos believed that the US entered World War 1 to protect banker J.P. Morgan's loans to France and Russia. Far fetched, but economic motives are almost always at play. Lenin certainly thought so. Nevertheless, I believe that Wilson, the US President at the time, and the vast bulk of the US people were motivated primarily by idealism (upholding democracy) in being prepared for American blood to be shed on the battlefields of that war. Much the same could be said of American entry into World War 11. In Australia we believe our motives for joining the “mother country” in both those wars was equally idealistic. Yet we would have to acknowledge that up until the fall of Singapore we relied on the British navy “ruling the waves” to protect our trade and our very existence here - so we had less glorious motives too.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> C the long civil war in Sierra Leone appeared to be winding down, monitored by a UN peace-keeping force, but by May 2000, Freetown was again threatened with destruction. The British intervened to save the failing UN mission and the weak government, finally defeating the rebels. No doubt the UK's “eternal interests” of a material sort were not contravened by the British action, but we must give credit too to an intervention which ended a period of destruction, pillage, rape and murder. **Perhaps Palmerston might have admitted that one of Britain's “eternal interests” was the maintenance of international law and order and at least some semblance of morality.** It is often a fine line as to whether such a motivation is genuine or just a good piece of camouflage. However, the better angels of human nature do exist in the international sphere and when we write letters of protest (or hopefully letters of commendation sometimes) to our governments we can be encouraged by that thought.

## Motherhood

**Dorothy Porter**

No longer will she  
flash  
like Fantasia  
across the sea floor

the giant octopus is dying

in her blue den  
her clusters of eggs  
swell like cysts

the giant octopus is dying

her moody vivid nervous system  
shut down and dun

the giant octopus is dying

her tentacles wave  
like drowned arms  
her ink bubbles away

the giant octopus is dying

she's got nothing left  
her eggs took the lot.

~~~~~

Dorothy Porter

(Australia, 1954–2008)

The work of Dorothy Porter, one of Australia's most popular and most read poets, both in Australia and abroad, is fuelled by a lusty, human humour and a generously sharp-tongued spirit. She grew up in Sydney and the Blue Mountains, living later in Melbourne, and published seven collections of poetry; two novels for young adults, two librettos for operas performed in Sydney, Melbourne and London; and four verse-novels.

.....

Porter commented:

Looking for an audience. Wanting to be understood by an audience. Was Dante in danger of being shipwrecked on the reef of

populist vulgarity? Many of the male Latin scholars of his own day were very dismissive of Dante's writing poetry in the vulgar tongue. Why would any great poet, they argued, care if ordinary people, too stupid or too uneducated or too plain simply DAUNTED, couldn't read his poetry?

Doesn't this ring a few modern bells for us in the contemporary poetry community? Do we care if we're read or not? Are we content, like the Latin scholars of medieval, squabbling Italy, to write within the confines of an exclusive club just for each other? Are we too writing in a 'dead' language?

.....

Porter is a defiant voice against the obscure and effete in poetry, unafraid to see poetry as a popular art form in the twentieth century, a feast open to all, immersed in the sweat, blood and tears of contemporary life, its hum-drum realities and headlong rush.

Read more:

<http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/668/15/Dorothy-Porter>



Dorothy Porter was born and educated in Sydney where she worked before moving to Melbourne in 1993 to live with her partner, novelist Andrea Goldsmith.

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## COMMON DREAMS 3 CONFERENCE

THIRD INTERNATIONAL GATHERING OF RELIGIOUS PROGRESSIVES

Manning Clark Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia  
19–22 September 2013

Conference Theme: "Midwives of Change: Progressives Shaping Religious Communities"

**Prof Marcus Borg (USA), Bruce Sanguin (Canada) David Felten (USA)**  
**Special International Guest: Dr Alan Race (Progressive Christianity Network, Britain)**

**(Just a taste)** :Thursday, 19th Sept. 2.00 – 4.30pm SPECIAL: Pre-Conference Forum

**"Offering an Alternative: Being Progressive Christians about Politics"**. An introduction to the work of A Progressive Christian Voice (Australia), especially as it stands in contrast to The Australian Christian Lobby.

Presenters: Dr John Langmore:

1. "An Economy of Life: Reimagining Human Progress for a Flourishing World"
2. "Building a More Socially Just Australian Society"

Dr Peter Catt:

1. "The Theology of Political Engagement"
2. "The Progressive Agenda, cf Conservatism"

Followed by Discussion and Afternoon Tea

**Read more: <http://www.commondreams.org.au/index.php/programs>**

**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 or Ginna Hastings 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.

***Do you have a topic of a spiritual nature that you would like to share with the congregation?*** As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**