



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship

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

Tel: **0466 940 461**

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## Schedule of Services

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

**5 August, Martin Horlacher, "The Greek Way."**

In her 1930 masterpiece "The Greek Way", American author Edith Hamilton demonstrates how the spirit of the Golden Age of Greece, in the fifth century BC, spurred the men and women of that time and place on to achievements that were unparalleled in the ancient world. Be it through the works of Homer, Sophocles and Euripides, the philosophy of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, or the treatises of Xenophon on civilised living, it is the ancient Greeks who arguably came closest to building what might be called the pinnacle of Western civilisation. As Hamilton herself puts it, "The Greeks were the first intellectualists. In a world where the irrational had played the chief role, they came forward as the protagonists of the mind." There is much we can learn from them today.

**12 August,**

**19 August, Rev. Geoff Usher, "Change."**

Change is the unchangeable law of the universe. It is the only thing that is constant. Indeed, to be constant in nature would be inconstancy. And to blind oneself to change is not to halt it.

**26 August, Morandir Armson, "Masonry - Facts and Fallacies."**

The Masonic brotherhood has existed since at least the 16th Century. Ever since the 18th Century, a number of troubling rumours, wild accusations, and bizarre conspiracy theories have swirled around Freemasonry and Freemasons. This presentation will seek to dispel these rumours, explain the truth about Freemasonry, and seek to portray the Masonic brotherhood as it really is - sometimes bizarre, sometimes mundane, but always of interest.

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"Politicians and nappies should be changed often and for the same reason"

*Contributed by Carolyn Donnelly*

## The Lunch Bag

(a true story of **Robert Fulghum** and his 7-year-old daughter Molly)

It was Molly's job to hand her father his brown paper lunch bag each morning before he headed off to work. One morning, in addition to his usual lunch bag, Molly handed him a second paper bag. This one was worn and held together with duct tape, staples, and paper clips.

"Why two bags" Fulghum asked.

"The other is something else," Molly answered.

"What's in it?"

"Just some stuff. Take it with you."

Not wanting to hold court over the matter, Fulghum stuffed both sacks into his briefcase, kissed Molly and rushed off. At midday, while hurriedly scarfing down his real lunch, he tore open Molly's bag and shook out the contents: two hair ribbons, three small stones, a plastic dinosaur, a pencil stub, a tiny sea shell, two animal crackers, a marble, a used lipstick, a small doll, two chocolate kisses, and 13 pennies. Fulghum smiled, finished eating, and swept the desk clean -- into the wastebasket -- leftover lunch, Molly's junk and all.

That evening, Molly ran up behind him as he read the newspaper. "Where's my bag?"

"What bag?"

"You know, the one I gave you this morning."

"I left it at the office. Why?"

"I forgot to put this note in it," she said. "And, besides, those are my things in the sack, Daddy, the ones I really like - I thought you might like to play with them, but now I want them back. You didn't lose the bag, did you, Daddy?"

"Oh, no," he said, lying. "I just forgot to bring it home. I'll bring it tomorrow."

While Molly hugged her father's neck, he un-

folded the note that had not made it into the sack: "I love you, Daddy." Molly had given him her treasures. All that a 7-year-old held dear. Love in a paper sack, and he missed it -- not only missed it, but had thrown it in the wastebasket.

So back he went to the office. Just ahead of the night janitor, he picked up the wastebasket and poured the contents on his desk. After washing the mustard off the dinosaurs and spraying the whole thing with breath-freshener to kill the smell of onions, he carefully smoothed out the wadded ball of brown paper, put the treasures inside and carried it home gingerly, like an injured kitten. The bag didn't look so good, but the stuff was all there and that's what counted.

After dinner, he asked Molly to tell him about the stuff in the sack. It took a long time to tell. Everything had a story or a memory or was attached to dreams and imaginary friends. Fairies had brought some of the things. He had given her the chocolate kisses, and she had kept them for when she needed them.

"Sometimes I think of all the times in this sweet life," Fulghum concludes the story, "when I must have missed the affection I was being given. A friend calls this 'standing knee deep in the river and dying of thirst'."

**As told in "A Spiritual Archives Story from All-Creatures.org"**

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The above was part of a  
service conducted by  
Rev Geoff Usher

"PAPER BAGS AND CALA-  
BASHES" 27 November 2016

This sermon can now be found on  
our website:

<http://www.sydneyunitarians.org/>

## The Shame

The shame of having to criticise one's own child hinders uncovering elder abuse.

### From an article in ABC News:

It's a shame which is being quietly felt throughout the nation's suburbs, which experts say are riddled with hidden victims of financial elder abuse at the hands of, predominantly, their own adult children.

But it's also this shame, as well as a desire to protect their children, which is preventing parents from reporting what can often be criminal behaviour, according to Curtin University law Professor Eileen Webb.

"Theft, fraud, there's quite a smorgasbord of offences that, if law enforcement wanted to get involved in this, they could use," she said.

"The criminal law is only triggered is when it's a very serious, headline-grabbing level of abuse. For example, if an older person experiences terrible physical abuse or passes away, or it's extremely large sums of money, and then you might get the law enforcement to act.

"But in most cases the older person won't want the police to get involved, because again, it's your child — you don't want your child sent to jail."

As a result of this reluctance to report, there is little hard data available on the prevalence of elder abuse in Australia.

But the World Health Organisation estimates about one in six people aged older than 60 will be victims each year.

An official definition is also hard to pin down, though experts agree it involves the abuse of an older person — whether physical, psychological, financial or by neglect — by a person they trust.

The majority of cases involve financial abuse or improperly using an older person's money or assets — for example refusing to repay a loan or forcing them to sign a financial docu-

ment like a will.

But it's a growing problem, with those working at the frontline of elder abuse — like community lawyer Fran Ottolini, who advises low-income victims in Perth's northern suburbs — seeing themselves as part of a burgeoning human rights movement: fighting ageism and protecting the rights of the elderly.

Ms Ottolini likens the movement to the early years of campaigns against domestic violence, when it was largely treated as a private problem for families and not a criminal offence.

"It is a human rights issue, just like domestic violence. We don't lose our rights just because we age," she said.

Ms Ottolini said the vast majority of her clients were "the capable but vulnerable" victims of financial abuse.

Capable, because they are cognitively able to make their own decisions.

But vulnerable, because they are dependent on their circle of trust — usually their children, extended family and carers.

Their only social contact may be through their families or they may rely on their children to have access to their grandchildren or take them to medical appointments.

The biggest source of financial elder abuse is via family agreements, according to Ms Ottolini.

Family agreements are usually informal agreements made between families, often verbally, and involve the transfer of assets between an older person and their family, for example:

- The parent sells their house and agrees to use the money to build a granny flat or for renovations so they can move in to their child's home.

- The parent lets a family member stay at their home rent free in exchange for taking care of them.

- The parent gives the child an interest-free loan, agrees to be a guarantor for their mort-

-gage, or takes out a mortgage on their behalf.

Because of the ad hoc nature of many of these agreements, it is almost impossible to determine just how many are in operation.

While most families begin these arrangements with good intentions and many work well, problems can arise when circumstances change, for example a serious illness or a new partner.

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Dr Webb, recommends that families put their arrangements into a legal contract to plan for all possible future contingencies and protect all parties.

She said verbal agreements do not have a strong basis in law and, if something goes wrong, it can be an expensive and emotional battle for an older person to get their money back.

"The most common scenario is that the older person sells their home, moves in with the child, often gives the child some money or makes some contribution towards extensions or a granny flat on that property," she said.

"But they are not on that title, so the adult child can deal with that property as they wish. It's their property — they can sell it, they can mortgage it.

"So, for example, we've seen cases where houses have literally been sold from under the older person."

The push to better protect older Australians is gaining momentum, with the Australian Law Reform Commission last year presenting 43 recommendations to the Federal Government for a "once in a lifetime opportunity" to tackle elder abuse.

The Government's early response included funding research to determine a definition and the extent of elder abuse.

Many states also have the issue on their agenda, with a South Australian parliamentary committee last year calling for the intro-

duction of adult protection legislation, similar to child protection laws.

**The above is part of an article "The silent epidemic of elder abuse in our suburbs" written by Rebecca Turner. Feb., 2018. The whole article may be read at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-04/the-silent-epidemic-of-elder-abuse-in-our-suburbs/9383812>**

## **Praise for Brexit is now Hard to Find**

It is dangerous to assume the past is superior to the present. After going back through all the crises since the end of the Second World War, however, I cannot find a time when Britain was so out of options and so out of luck. By "options", I don't mean escape routes liberal readers of the Observer would welcome, just alternatives that seemed plausible at the time.

Suez? Get the troops out of Egypt. Union militancy? Thatcher. The degradation of the public realm? New Labour. The crash of 2008? Austerity. There was always an escape, however unpalatable. Now, to steal William Hague's description of the eurozone crisis, Brexit Britain is a burning building with no exits. The alarms ring but no rescuers come.

If you try to understand as well as condemn the architects of Brexit, you see at once that their hopes are in pieces. The strategic basis for Brexit was that Britain would cut its ties with its European allies and set out across the oceans to create a new alliance with America. They believed that some as yet undiscovered hereditary principle guaranteed that the Anglosphere – the white Commonwealth plus America – promoted free trade and prosperity.

In vain did their opponents argue that our trade with the EU vastly exceeded our trade with the US and that a strong America would turn on a weak Britain and force it to accept chlorinated chicken and the privatisation of NHS services. Tories of all people were meant to know that life wasn't fair, we said.

The classically educated among them ought to have learned Thucydides's warning that in international affairs, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must". Trump was an America First protectionist who no more believed in free trade than he supported the #MeToo movement.

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**A second defeat is worth noting. To its proponents, Brexit was never meant to threaten Britain's security. By last week, it was clear that Trump's America, on which the Tory right has gambled our futures, is a clear and present danger to Nato. With a wonderful serendipity, as Trump was meeting the Queen, the US Department of Justice indicted 12 alleged Russian spies for helping Trump to power. We already know that Russia wanted Trump because he was against Nato and because, in all his foul harangues, has never once uttered a bad word about Putin.**

**At the parochial level, the Tories ought to be terrified. They want to attack Jeremy Corbyn for being against Nato and in favour of anti-western dictatorial regimes. But Brexit is tying the Tories in general and Johnson and the Tory right in particular to a US president who is against Nato and in favour of anti-western dictatorial regimes.**

Step back from local politics and the global picture looks worse. "The west" is based on the American military guarantee to Nato. If Trump and Putin weaken or abolish it, the west would have to be rebuilt, assuming that it survives at all. A confident government would look around and suspend or cancel Brexit, because this was not the time to tear up Britain's alliances with Paris and Berlin.

Politicians across parliament know it but dare not say it. The referendum result prevents them from speaking out, as it prevents them from even having a Mueller-style inquiry into Russian interference in our referendum. You could almost burst out laughing. Brexit was meant to have been about taking back control; instead, it has produced a country in the grip of an uncontrollable neurosis.

All the symptoms are there. No one – not Jacob Rees-Mogg, Boris Johnson, Theresa May or Jeremy Corbyn – can tell the public the truth that we either stay so closely aligned to the EU that there is no point in leaving or we suffer a shuddering economic shock and a catastrophic fall in our global standing .

Like the First World War generals who thought their men could pierce impregnable defences, if only they threw themselves at them with enough elan, the Tory right pretends we could have our cake and eat it if only we spoke louder. Trump would know how to deal with the EU, an admiring Johnson cried: "He'd go in bloody hard." The bloody hard strategy is calling the EU's bluff by preparing for a no-deal Brexit. As the EU knows, no deal would cause chaos; the threat has all the conviction of a man pulling a gun in a bank and shouting: "Give me the money or I'll shoot myself in the heart."

Last, but not least, is the paralysis that accompanies advanced neurosis. Quite possibly, there is no majority in parliament not just for no deal or May's deal (whatever that is) but for any deal and we will slip into chaos for want of an alternative.

The rightwing press accuses supporters of the EU of thinking the 17.4 million who voted Leave are stupid. I don't, but I do think the 2016 referendum was stupid – cretinously so to the point of idiocy. With unforgivable cynicism, Vote Leave refused to explain what Brexit would entail for fear of weakening its cause. Unlike the Irish government before the abortion referendum, the Cameron government did not spell out what Brexit would mean. We're working out the meaning of Brexit after rather than before the referendum.

I still believe in the common sense of most (if not all) of my fellow citizens. Their tragedy is that by the time understanding dawns they will find that they have voted to lock themselves in a burning building and to throw away the key.

**The above is an edited version of an article "Brexit Britain is out of options. Our**

humiliation is painful to watch”, written by Nick Cohen. The Guardian, July, 2018. The whole article can be read here: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/14/brexit-britain-out-of-options-humiliation-painful>

*Contributed by Carolyn Donnelly*  
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## Extract from Barack Obama's Nelson Mandela Speech

Which is why, at the end of the twentieth century, while some Western commentators were declaring the end of history and the inevitable triumph of liberal democracy and the virtues of the global supply chain, so many missed signs of a brewing backlash—a backlash that arrived in so many forms. It announced itself most violently with 9/11 and the emergence of transnational terrorist networks, fuelled by an ideology that perverted one of the world's great religions and asserted a struggle not just between Islam and the West but between Islam and modernity. An ill-advised U.S. invasion of Iraq didn't help, accelerating a sectarian conflict.

Russia, already humiliated by its reduced influence since the collapse of the Soviet Union, feeling threatened by democratic movements along its borders, suddenly started reasserting authoritarian control and, in some cases, meddling with its neighbors. China, emboldened by its economic success, started bristling against criticism of its human-rights record; it framed the promotion of universal values as nothing more than foreign meddling, imperialism under a new name.

Within the United States, within the European Union, challenges to globalization first came from the left but then came more forcefully from the right, as you started seeing populist movements—which, by the way, are often cynically funded by right-wing billionaires intent on reducing government constraints on their business interests. These movements tapped the unease that was felt by many people who lived outside of the urban cores, fears that economic security was slipping away, that their social status and privileges were eroding, that their cultural identities were being threatened by outsiders, somebody that didn't look

like them or sound like them or pray as they did.

And, perhaps more than anything else, the devastating impact of the 2008 financial crisis, in which the reckless behavior of financial élites resulted in years of hardship for ordinary people all around the world, made all the previous assurances of experts ring hollow—all those assurances that somehow financial regulators knew what they were doing, that somebody was minding the store, that global economic integration was an unadulterated good. Because of the actions taken by governments during and after that crisis—including, I should add, by aggressive steps by my Administration—the global economy has now returned to healthy growth. But the credibility of the international system, the faith in experts in places like Washington or Brussels, all that had taken a blow.

**A politics of fear and resentment and re-trenchment began to appear, and that kind of politics is now on the move. It's on the move at a pace that would have seemed unimaginable just a few years ago. I am not being alarmist. I am simply stating the facts. Look around. Strongman politics are ascendant, suddenly, whereby elections and some pretense of democracy are maintained—the form of it—but those in power seek to undermine every institution or norm that gives democracy meaning.**

In the West, you've got far-right parties that oftentimes are based not just on platforms of protectionism and closed borders but also on barely hidden racial nationalism. Many developing countries now are looking at China's model of authoritarian control, combined with mercantilist capitalism, as preferable to the messiness of democracy. Who needs free speech, as long as the economy is going good? The free press is under attack. Censorship and state control of media is on the rise. Social media—once seen as a mechanism to promote knowledge and understanding and solidarity—has proved to be just as effective promoting hatred and paranoia and propaganda and conspiracy theories.

**So on Madiba's one-hundredth birthday,**

**we now stand at a crossroads, a moment in time when two very different visions of humanity's future compete for the hearts and the minds of citizens around the world. Two different stories. Two different narratives about who we are and who we should be. How should we respond?**

Should we see that wave of hope that we felt with Madiba's release from prison, from the Berlin Wall coming down—should we see that hope that we had as naïve and misguided? Should we understand the last twenty-five years of global integration as nothing more than a detour from the previous inevitable cycle of history? Where might makes right, and politics is a hostile competition between tribes and races and religions, and nations compete in a zero-sum game, constantly teetering on the edge of conflict until full-blown war breaks out? Is that what we think?

Let me tell you what I believe. I believe in Nelson Mandela's vision. I believe in a vision shared by Gandhi and King and Abraham Lincoln. I believe in a vision of equality and justice and freedom and multiracial democracy, built on the premise that all people are created equal, and they're endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights. I believe that a world governed by such principles is possible, and that it can achieve more peace and more cooperation in pursuit of a common good. That's what I believe.

And I believe we have no choice but to move forward, that those of us who believe in democracy and civil rights and a common humanity have a better story to tell. And I believe this not just based on sentiment. I believe it based on hard evidence: the fact that the world's most prosperous and successful societies, the ones with the highest living standards and the highest levels of satisfaction among their people, happen to be those which have most closely approximated the liberal, progressive ideal that we talk about and have nurtured the talents and contributions of all their citizens.

The fact that authoritarian governments have been shown, time and time again, to breed corruption, because they're not accountable;

to repress their people; to lose touch eventually with reality; to engage in bigger and bigger lies that ultimately result in economic and political and cultural and scientific stagnation. Look at history. Look at the facts.

The fact that countries which rely on rabid nationalism and xenophobia and doctrines of tribal, racial, or religious superiority as their main organizing principle, the thing that holds people together—eventually those countries find themselves consumed by civil war or external war. Check the history books.

The fact that technology cannot be put back in a bottle, so we're stuck with the fact that we now live close together and populations are going to be moving, and environmental challenges are not going to go away on their own, so that the only way to effectively address problems like climate change or mass migration or pandemic disease will be to develop systems for more international cooperation, not less.

We have a better story to tell. But to say that our vision for the future is better is not to say that it will inevitably win. Because history also shows the power of fear. History shows the lasting hold of greed and the desire to dominate others in the minds of men. Especially men. History shows how easily people can be convinced to turn on those who look different, or worship God in a different way. So if we're truly to continue Madiba's long walk towards freedom, we're going to have to work harder, and we're going to have to be smarter. We're going to have to learn from the mistakes of the recent past. And so, in the brief time remaining, let me just suggest a few guideposts for the road ahead, guideposts that draw from Madiba's work, his words, the lessons of his life.

First, Madiba shows those of us who believe in freedom and democracy we are going to have to fight harder to reduce inequality and promote lasting economic opportunity for all people.

Now, I don't believe in economic determinism. Human beings don't live on bread alone. But they need bread. And history shows that societies which tolerate vast differences in

Wealth feed resentments and reduce solidarity and actually grow more slowly, and that once people achieve more than mere subsistence, then they're measuring their well-being by how they compare to their neighbors, and whether their children can expect to live a better life. When economic power is concentrated in the hands of the few, history also shows that political power is sure to follow. That dynamic eats away at democracy. Sometimes it may be straight-out corruption, but sometimes it may not involve the exchange of money; it's just folks who are that wealthy get what they want, and it undermines human freedom.

Madiba understood this. This is not new. He warned us about this. He said, "Where globalization means, as it so often does, that the rich and the powerful now have new means to further enrich and empower themselves at the cost of the poorer and the weaker, [then] we have a responsibility to protest in the name of universal freedom." That's what he said. So if we are serious about universal freedom today, if we care about social justice today, then we have a responsibility to do something about it. And I would respectfully amend what Madiba said. I don't do it often, but I'd say it's not enough for us to protest; we're going to have to build, we're going to have to innovate, we're going to have to figure out how do we close this widening chasm of wealth and opportunity, both within countries and between them.

How we achieve this is going to vary country to country, and I know your new President is committed to rolling up his sleeves and trying to do so. But we can learn from the last seventy years that it will not involve unregulated, unbridled, unethical capitalism. It also won't involve old-style command-and-control socialism from the top. That was tried. It didn't work very well. For almost all countries, progress is going to depend on an inclusive, market-based system, one that offers education for every child, that protects collective bargaining and secures the rights of every worker, that breaks up monopolies to encourage competition in small and medium-sized businesses, and has laws that root out corruption and insures fair dealing in business, that maintains some form of progressive taxation so that rich people are still rich, but they're giving a little bit back to make sure that everybody else has something to pay for universal health care and retirement security, and invests in infrastructure and scientific research that builds platforms for innovation. **Read more:** [https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-nelson-mandela-lecture-barack-obama-johannesburg?mbid=nl\\_Daily%20071918&CNDID=52773682&spMailingID=13903962&spUserID=MjUyNDA5OTg4NjI1S0&spJobID=1441625661&spReportId=MTQ0MTYyNTY2MQS2](https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-nelson-mandela-lecture-barack-obama-johannesburg?mbid=nl_Daily%20071918&CNDID=52773682&spMailingID=13903962&spUserID=MjUyNDA5OTg4NjI1S0&spJobID=1441625661&spReportId=MTQ0MTYyNTY2MQS2)

### **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*. 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: [jantendys@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jantendys@yahoo.com.au) or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

***Do you have a topic of a spiritual / ethical 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**

**Website [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org)**