

# NUF

# Newsletter!



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*“In the flow of religious thought and practice,  
Unitarians represent openness and inquiry in the spiritual quest”*

## ***Finding Unitarians in Unusual Places***

We may not be a large organisation but it can be surprising where we may unexpectedly bump into other Unitarians.

For the first time in our lives we embarked on our Rail Discovery Holiday, which would take us through the Highlands of Scotland and over to the Outer Hebrides. We looked forward to meeting new people and this proved to be one of the most enjoyable parts of the holiday.

On the second evening, in Fort William, we got talking to a lovely couple as we relaxed over a drink in the bar. They told us how they had met in Derbyshire. We asked them where and they said we wouldn't know it as it was a small village with a hotel which served the most delicious rhubarb crumble. After insisting, which village it was, they told us it was Great Hucklow and immediately we knew it must be The Nightingale Centre, and so it was. Richard and Lynne Varley are active Unitarians with Richard working with my husband, John, on the FOY website. They were in fact already e-friends. None of us had any prior idea we would meet on this holiday and what a lovely surprise it was. You can imagine the many connections we already had through mutual friends and the people we all work with in the various societies and smaller groups.

We enjoyed each other's company throughout the holiday as we travelled on train, coach and ferry, visiting the various Scottish landmarks. The scenery was spectacular, and we saw places we would never have visited had we been on our own.

We had been looking forward to riding on the steam train from Fort William to Mallaig. The train was called the Jacobite, but most people would probably recognize it as 'The Hogwarts Express' from the film *Harry Potter*. And yes, we did go over the viaduct as seen on the film.

On the Isle of Lewis, we visited Gearannan Black House Village, now conserved. This was a small community of Harris Tweed weavers. We watched the weaving of fabric and of course visited the shop, where I bought a Harris Tweed hat, which I wore for the rest of the holiday. However, when we visited Point it was far too windy for a hat. It was interesting to drive past the crofters' fields

marked out in strips.

Whilst everyone else on the mainland was enjoying the hot weather, on the Isle of Lewis the temperature was nearer the 10°C, with the forecasters telling us daily that the rest of the country was basking in temperatures nearer 30°C. It was also very windy on the island. However, that didn't spoil our visit to the Callenish Stones, Neolithic Standing Stones, not a circle, rather avenues of large stones leading up to a central burial tomb.

Were we in high spirits or perhaps touching our spiritual roots as we made the obligatory visit to the Ben Nevis Distillery? Is it from the effect of drinking whiskey that the family of drinks, named as spirits, is derived? As you can see, along with our new-found friends, we enjoyed this particular visit immensely.

Will we keep in touch other than electronically? I do hope so.

*Joan Wilkinson*



(L-R) Richard & Lynne Varley with  
Joan & John Wilkinson



## *NUF Monthly Reflections*

Tony McNeile wrote and presented the June Reflection: *Glorious June*, which can be viewed at: [www.ukunitarian.tv?nuf-jun18](http://www.ukunitarian.tv?nuf-jun18) . This was filmed before the drought had set in and when our gardens were in full bloom. What a difference a few weeks can make.

### *Glorious June*

Glorious wonderful sunlit June, the cornerstone in the arch of the year. Maybe it is because I was born in June that I feel it is my month of the year. Look around at the gardens, the cottage flowers have reached for the sun and stand astride all opposition. The trees could not be greener, they are richly green. It all seems to have happened at once. One day we were looking for the first green blush of spring and then came the month of May like a bridesmaid preparing this June bride's rich and flowing gown. And here it is. Wow, Sun please keep shining. I am bowled over by summer.

My heart sings because I feel the spirit of life is out and about. I wish it for you! I am probably so excited about it because so often all the expectations of June are washed away with rain but now it is here, and the sun is shining. Don't think about the rain.

I have a friend who doesn't like June or summer. It is too hot, there is too much light and it wakes him up too early. Where I hear the blackbird sing, he hears a noisy racket. Where I see dragonflies, he sees wasps. He thinks flowers smell sickly where I embrace the love they exude. We are good friends, but we are different. He tolerates my optimism. I tolerate his intolerance of joyfulness. Bit like life really, or is it?

Mostly we like people who like what we like. Many people find it difficult to accept difference and that leads so easily to a polarised world. Don't discuss politics or religion everyone says because it will lead to arguments and falling out. We in this country have a long tradition of being adversarial and polarised in our opinions. Our political parties and Courts face each other off to win and not to lose. And where I live the Brexit debate is still going on.

The alternative is an inquisitorial system which seeks to find the

truth within. It turns over all the facts without taking sides and the alternative is an inquisitorial system which seeks to find the truth within. It turns over all the facts without taking sides and seeks to find a solution or a way forward that all parties recognise and accept. A bit like life should be really. But this is June. Flaming so far.

I sit on the bench in the garden and just take it all in. Here comes my friend and he joins me. A little murmuration of young birds are using a lot of energy around the tree, taking off and landing, starting to pick at the seeds and taking off and coming back. I can't tell which is the leader or the motivator, but something is working them as a group.

That's how we all should be I say, working as one. How much more can be achieved working together. Yes, but look, says my friend. Look at each individual bird. There is a lot of squabbling going on. They will not have another intruding in their space for all their working together. Bit like life really. But they are not killing each other I reply. The positive side of me sees their assertive behaviour as knowing who you are, being self-confident and self-sufficient. When we have that then we can work and live well in the group, and yes, of course you have to hang on to those spiritual values that make you who you are and not be undermined by the naysayers. That is the ideal life to try to be a bit like.

Enjoy the month of June.

For the first time in years, *Reflections* took a month off in July, as we were away enjoying a holiday in Scotland and the Outer Hebrides. However, our time on the Isle of Lewis provided more than enough material for the August Reflection: *A Sense of Place*, which can be viewed at: [www.ukunitarian.tv?nuf-aug18](http://www.ukunitarian.tv?nuf-aug18) .

### *A sense of place*

How important is place for you?

I find certain places evoke a strong sense of identity – something solid – a continuity in a world of rapid change. This continuity can be a challenge to the ideals on which our modern world is organized.

Never more was this impressed upon me than on our recent holiday to the Outer Hebrides. We arrived on the Isle of Harris and Lewis in mid-summer and it seemed as if we had landed back in time, even though the capital, Stornaway had all the trappings of any other Scottish town. We arrived on Friday evening and after having been driven through a sparsely inhabited mountainous and moorland countryside we were surprised to arrive in 'rush hour', although, that is a bit of an exaggeration. However, when we had a walk around the town in the early evening we wondered where all the people were, it was so quiet. This was unlike a Friday on the mainland, where locals would be out shopping, at the cinema, nightclub or having a drink with friends.

This was nothing like the quietness of the town and the island on the Sunday, with the exception of the churches, which seemed to have no trouble attracting worshippers for their Sunday Services. The people of the island didn't agree with shops opening on a Sunday, defying the decision made on the mainland. Not only was it important to go to church on a Sunday with shops being closed, this was a day when islanders didn't work but spent it with their families. Whilst I may find the strictness and dogma of their particular understanding of faith not to my taste, I do admire the sense of community which is underpinned by a religion which continues to hold the Sabbath, denying a commercialism which none of us in our more liberal understanding can escape from, even for a day. It was interesting to note that the church car parks were as big as any large supermarket in England.

On one of our tours we visited the Callanish Standing Stones a cruciform pattern with a central circle. The stones were erected in the late Neolithic period and must have been a focus for ritual activity. Within the central stone circle is a chambered tomb. I could sense the importance of place and felt how this was just another example of the rootedness of the people of the Isle of Lewis. As I touched one of the stones I felt no longer a stranger but a connection to what had gone before a relationship with the island and its people. In all probability I will never visit this place again, but that sense of rootedness feels to be a blessing that can never be taken away.

*Joan Wilkinson*



## *Minister's Page*

We had a spectacular view from where we live of the fires on Winter Hill. At first you think it is a cloud or summer mist until you see the energy of it and realise it is smoke. This cloud of smoke slowly filled the horizon and we soon learned that it was a major moorland fire threatening the great mast and all the communication structures on the hill. Unattended it could have reached the villages in the shadow of the hill, Rivington and Belmont.

A month later it was finally under control and roads in the area were being reopened. We had lived through the drama through the photographs that had been placed on social media. Pictures of firemen beating the flames out. They faced heat from the flames and heat from the sun burning on their backs as they worked. Pictures of a fireman saving a small bird, pictures of sunsets through the flames. They were both beautiful and frightening.

At that stage the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network in Bolton held a service of thanksgiving in the Rivington Unitarian Chapel. Thanksgiving that the fire was under control and thanksgiving that there was already a blush of green as the grass grew again through the ashes.

The Fire Chief who came to the service told us how the fire had developed from two small separate fires to become a dangerous

single expanse of destruction. Seven fire engines were sent to the first fire and another seven to the second. Then they called in more resources. Specialist crews came from as far away as Northumberland, South Wales and London. All had to be accommodated and fed.

Then he went on to talk about the contribution of the local communities. Bottles of drinking water were sent up, then a refrigerated van to keep it cold, pizza deliveries and an ice cream van were all made available to the firefighters. People sent up sun cream for them. Local workers cut down trees to make fire breaks. The local mountain rescue unit worked shifts over twenty four hours a day. All at no cost. All because of the spirit of care within the community burst through. The fire chief spoke with emotion about the spirit of community that supported his crews.

We realised there is a goodness within people that might not seem apparent in day to day living, but come a crisis, it does break into life. People are no longer just individuals but become part of a group with a common urge to help their fellow beings. Another month has gone by and the fire is finally out and the firemen have gone home and all the roads have reopened. We are left to reflect on the hidden quality of goodness in our community in a world that is usually so self seeking.

## *Worship page*

In the park near our house there was a commotion in the trees. The crows were attacking a hawk that had stolen one of their own. This is the way of the natural world. The human being is different. There are two natures in the human heart. One is to protect its own kind. The other is to dehumanise its own. The first stage of dispute or conflict is to declare that the other person or people has no worth and so can be denied the dignity of being a fellow human. They can then be treated with contempt, even destroyed. Those who fight could not function if they saw their foe as human as themselves. The 'enemy' is given other names such as insurgent, rebel or terrorist.

'Love your enemy' was a command not to dehumanise another. How different the world would be if we could all overcome this second trait in ourselves.

## *Prayer*

Pray for those caught up in the daily life of our changing earth. We people a planet that is a living organism. It's movements and stresses damage our human life as catastrophes. We have no power to control nature only to predict its actions. Pray for those whose work is to rescue the injured and care for them. Give thanks for the spirit of love and community that brings volunteers to risk their own lives in the search for survivors.

*Tony McNeile*

## Secretary's Notes

I hope you have all been enjoying the summer and the sunshine. The only downside has been the moorland fires, one of which was within two miles of my house. Fortunately, the fire is now out and hopefully the moorland will recover soon. I understand that there are already green areas appearing. How wonderful is nature!

I expect many of you will have been away on holiday. Not for me this year, as I have had a lot of work done to my house. However, I am looking forward to the Four Groups weekend at the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, in October. The NUF is joining up with the Peace Fellowship, the Unitarian Renewal Group and the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network for a weekend of learning about each other and working together, as well as enjoying the beautiful surroundings. It should be a fruitful and mutually beneficial weekend and I am greatly looking forward to it.

I feel I am almost an 'old hand' now in the Secretary role. It has proved to be a smooth transition from the last Secretary, except for one or two 'sticking points' at various times of the year, when I still may have to ask a few questions! Everyone has been very understanding and helpful, and I thank you all for your patience with me. I will now go and see if the workmen need (yet another) brew, as we say in the north! I will need to stock up on teabags!

Enjoy the rest of the summer.

*Janet*

### **FOUR GROUPS WEEKEND**

**26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

Bookings are going very well but there are still some spaces left. If you intend to go, it is important you get your booking made quickly.

You can find a form on the NUF website at:

<http://www.nufonline.org.uk/NUF2015/pdfs/Booking%20Form.pdf>

Please return the form to Joan Wilkinson and ring Stella at The Nightingale Centre to book your room. Details are on the form.

I look forward to seeing many NUF members at Hucklow in October, for what should be a full and satisfying weekend.

## *The Unitarian Music Society Weekend*

Why is it that this annual event goes from strength to strength, whilst other groups struggle to attract numbers? The Nightingale Centre is fully booked and the weekend's programme packed with a wide variety of music in every available space. It is so successful that it is a three-day event rather than the usual two. The only sadness for me is that other Unitarians don't get to hear the result of the work that is put in over the weekend. For me, the Music Society is the brightest gem in the Unitarian crown. It appeals across the generations and the weekend attracts new people each year.

It is usual to have a main choral piece, accompanied by an orchestra. This year we tackled Fauré's *Requiem* sung in Latin. This was new to me, but the satisfaction I felt by the performance on Sunday evening, outweighed the struggle of learning the piece. In between rehearsals of the *Requiem* where we looked at the music in detail, were sessions for recorder players, madrigal singers, chamber music, handbells, wind and string ensembles plus much more informal making of music.

On Saturday evening there is the usual informal concert, where we perform for each other. Musicians and poetry readers sign up with their contribution to the evening. This time gives an opportunity for instruments which don't usually play together, to perform in an informal setting. Mistakes, not that there are many of course, are met with encouragement rather than a severe judgement by a maestro.

The Sunday evening concert is a different thing altogether. Villagers and visitors to the village plus local Unitarians, make up the audience, which seems to have grown each year that I've been attending. I have to admit to a few nerves on the Sunday evening, but as always it went very well. The choir want to make sure they do everything their Musical Director, David Dawson, has drilled into them over the weekend. The soloists are gifted as are the string groups and madrigals. However, it is the hand bell performance

that causes me most stress. Will the team hold together with such little practice behind them? I need not have worried as each player did well and the improvement from last year was noticeable.

One of the highlights for me this year was the Sunday Service at The Old Chapel in Great Hucklow. One of our younger members, Elizabeth Rosenberg, led the service on a theme of 'finding ourselves'. It was open, honest and inspirational. The anthems had been rehearsed earlier and the hymns only gave added meaning to the service. It is a joy to be part of a worship service when the chapel is full of people who love singing.

I feel sure the success of the weekend is down to the fact that within the Unitarian movement we have many gifted musicians, who are also able and willing organisers, making sure this particular event continues to run smoothly.

I am already looking forward to next year's Music Conference on 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> August and just hope that I manage to secure a booking. Do visit the website: <http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/music/> . For those who may be interested in joining the membership fee is very reasonable at £7 for an individual adult.

*Joan Wilkinson*



## AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

Voting by the members has been taking place regarding an Amendment to the Constitution. The Committee's proposal that the wording "The Executive Committee will consist of the four Honorary Officers and eight ordinary members." should be amended to "The Executive Committee will consist of the four Honorary Officers and four ordinary members." was carried in favour of the recommendation.

### *NUF President Autumn 2018*

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I feel quite guilty at having been your president for 5 months and not yet having contributed to the newsletter. For me 2018 has been a rather traumatic year and inspiration stifling but today I feel a lot more verbose. To many people I was the annoying person who sidled up to you at the GA Meetings and suggested that you might like to renew your NUF subscription – I had no shame (I still haven't!). To many of you that was all you knew about me. On my last birthday spent at RE Summer School I admitted to being 2 cubed times 3 squared. To me Summer School was my time to re-examine my spiritual values and re-evaluate my view of life as moulded by my biological maternal grandparents (I know zilch about my biological paternal grandparents apart from the fact that my biological father was reputed to be Canadian) and my paternal grandparents and my parents.

But to start at the beginning, my biological grandmother, great-uncle, and grandfather mother were all born in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Why should I include my great-uncle who my whole biological family refer to as "Little Lord Fauntleroy" (after the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett); because of the picture of him on the wall of my living room, aged under 5, kneeling on a wing chair dressed in a velvet suit. As my late wife and my friends know I am interested in psychology and Little Lord Fauntleroy had an effect on my biological family; firstly because he enlisted in the First World War and was killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme (July 1<sup>st</sup> 1916) rescuing another officer (about which I have written a poem this year called 'I Bloody Told Him'), and secondly

because one of my uncles was named Cecil after him, a name he detested and dropped in favour of his second given name when he came back from World War II and was (as far as I know) an early rebellion against my biological grandmother, who was the family matriarch and not a lady to be crossed! The psychologist in me often ponders on the effect of losing your only sibling in such a traumatic way and how it affected my grandmother, my aunt, my uncles, my cousins, and my half-sisters!

Fate hadn't quite finished with my biological grandmother! Whilst working at a hospital my biological grandmother met and fell in love with a doctor from Ireland. He finished his houseman training, they got married and he became a GP in Tenby in Wales. Four children followed but disaster struck on Christmas Day 1929 when my biological grandfather died from a bacterial infection in the days before anti-biotics. My biological grandmother's reaction was much the same as the mother of the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams – gather the kids up and move to be with her parents, who had now moved to Bournemouth. My biological grandmother doted on my younger uncle (born 1929) and my aunt aged 9 was left to bring up the other two. World War II arrived; my aunt had become a nurse; my younger uncle was still at school; Uncle Cecil enlisted; and my mother had a whale of a time. When everything had settled down post-war my mother announced that she was pregnant with me which caused quite a fuss and I was put up for adoption; much to my aunt's annoyance. She would have adopted me herself but was impossible on a nurse's wage but she acted as midwife when I was born.

So I am now left with a lifetime of what-ifs. What if my great-uncle hadn't been killed in "the war to end all wars" – what if antibiotics had been discovered 15 years earlier and my grandfather hadn't died – what if my aunt had been allowed to adopt me! ..... So many what ifs; but then I would never have had my parents and the rest of my family with all their problems and tragedies but that will have to wait for later. But I always find it productive to go back over your life and examine the what ifs.

*Howard Wilkins*

## I told him!

I told him not to light the bloody fire

“They’ll see us! Not out here Arthur!”

But with typical cussed Cornish grit he lit one. Fanned the glow –  
blow – a glowing coal.

“See they can’t see us!”

One, two, three

Testing he stoops

Four

A flash cracks out – he groans

A freezing hand!

So here I am all alone

What would my sister want me to do?

Save him “bring him home”

Slither in the mud – lift him

Drag – oh what a weight!

Back. Back. Slowly back – nearly there

I see the moonlight flash on a button

Another crack!

What will mother say when she gets the letter

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