

National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarians
And Free Christian Churches

News & Views

Issue 3

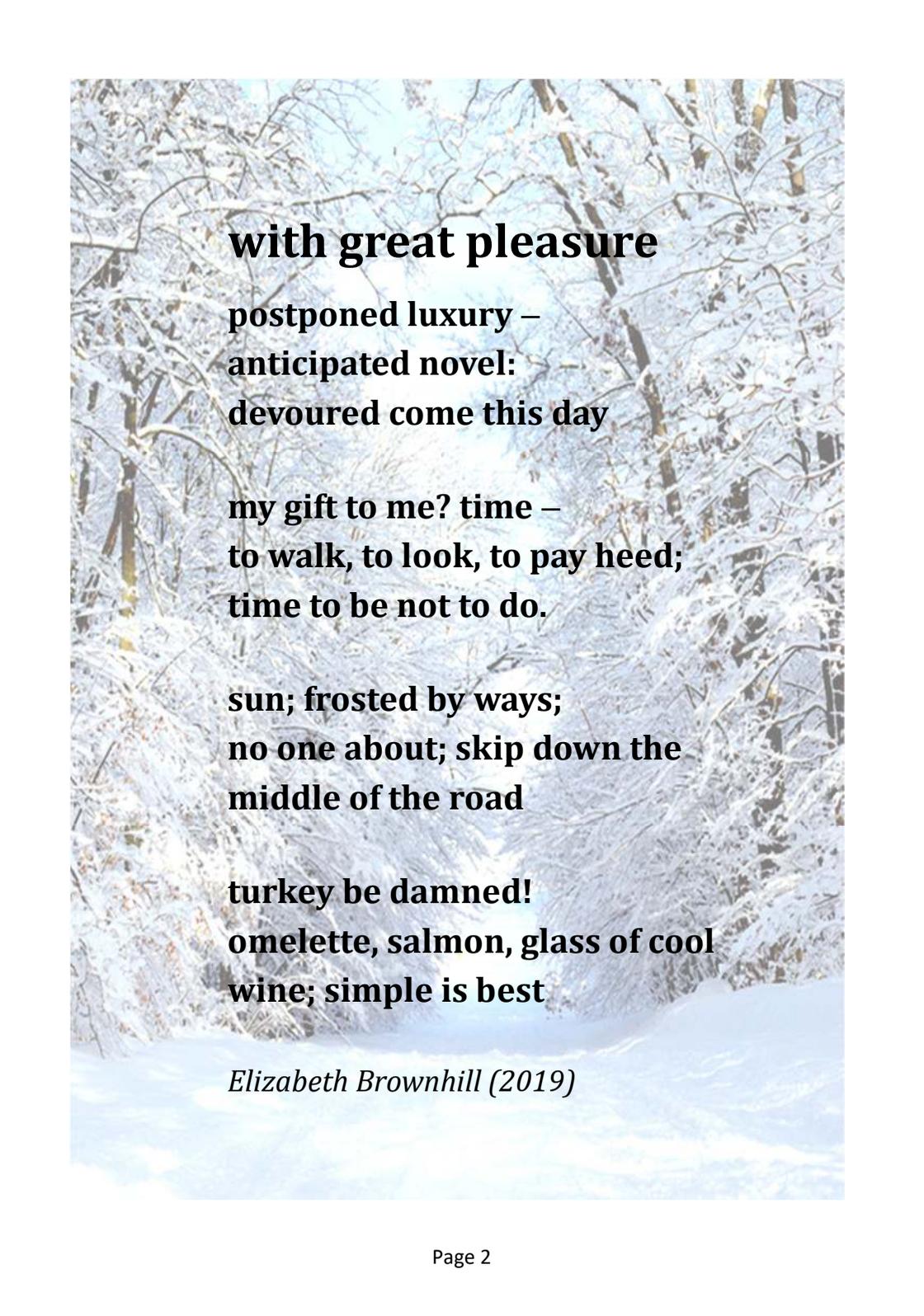


Winter 2019



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

Registered Charity No. 1040294



with great pleasure

**postponed luxury –
anticipated novel:
devoured come this day**

**my gift to me? time –
to walk, to look, to pay heed;
time to be not to do.**

**sun; frosted by ways;
no one about; skip down the
middle of the road**

**turkey be damned!
omelette, salmon, glass of cool
wine; simple is best**

Elizabeth Brownhill (2019)

From your Editor

Welcome to the winter edition of *News & Views*, which is packed with items from regular contributors and new. Thank you to all. I would also like to thank those who have commented privately. All suggestions and comments are welcome.

The name Arthur Lismer, a Canadian Unitarian artist, mentioned in Sue Woolley's article in the last edition of *News & Views*, caught the eye of one of our readers. She points out that Harry Lismer Short, a past Principal of Harris College Oxford, has Arthur listed on his family tree. Other than reading on the Internet that Arthur Lismer had his roots in Sheffield, his parents being Unitarian, I could find out little more. If any of our readers could provide more information, or even write a piece for the next edition, it would be very gratefully received. Enclosed with this month's distribution is the Renewal Form for 2020. We are pleased to say that the fee is unchanged.

The Fellowship will be sorry to hear that our Secretary, Janet Lythgoe, will be standing down at the AGM. Janet has quietly gone about ensuring that the Fellowship ran smoothly over the past three years and I would like to thank her on behalf of you all.

Without volunteers to take on roles which will ensure the survival of the Fellowship our future is not guaranteed. The Committee would encourage members who feel they might be able to help, to contact any of the names listed on the back cover of this publication.

Nick Saunders has volunteered to become Joint Editor of *News & Views*. I am looking forward to working with Nick, who I know will bring some fresh ideas to the job. Articles can be submitted to either Nick or me. Nick's email address is: rnssaunders@outlook.com

The GA Meetings will be held on 7th-9th April 2020 in Birmingham.

Items for submission to the Spring Edition of *News & Views* should be sent to the editor by 15th February 2020

Joan Wilkinson

SECRETARY'S NOTES

It seems no time at all since I was writing about autumn leaves and their changing hues, but that season is over, and we are now on the run-up to Christmas.

Are you one of those people who begins early to buy cards and presents, and who has everything finished in good time, or one who waits for last minute bargains and spends a busy few days before Christmas buying and preparing everything? I would like to think that I fall somewhere in between, as I begin quite early to think what people may like as presents, and if I see such an item, I purchase it, and so the presents gradually accumulate. Then, all of a sudden, it is over, and a new year will be upon us.

What will that bring, I wonder?

I do wish all of our members a very happy Christmas, and may the New Year bring you joy and peace.

Janet Lythgoe

Wanted: Secretary for the NUF.

**If you are interested, please contact
Janet Lythgoe on 01204 695582
or at: nuf@nufonline.org**

Minister's Page

Religion is in decline. The church is in decline. We in the NUF are in decline. Why? Because faith and belief are everywhere in decline. We live in a practical fast-moving world. Progress in scientific terms is phenomenal. We may yet see astronauts going to Mars and a space station on the moon. And when we look around us at our earth, we see it is not a beloved vernal earth but a polluted and exploited earth. This is not a time of peace and our largest home industry is the manu-

facture and sale of weapons and armaments.

Whatever happened to God? Maybe God left in disgust centuries ago. Maybe there never was one. Maybe God is not the God we have always thought of but someone or maybe something quite different.

I was reading on a YouTube channel that God has been disproved and dislodged by science. God didn't create the world in seven days. There was no virgin birth and no resurrection because science has proved both to be impossible. Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Darwin have done for God. Even the gaps that God was left with have been filled in.

Perhaps I should throw my clerical collar in the wheelie bin and accept the game is over, but I won't. The world of science may be doing for the church and its traditional teaching but there is one thing they can't change and that is the human spirit that asks why rather than how.

They can tell us how the universe was formed, how the earth was formed and how humanity came into being, but not why.

The spirit within us wants to know why. Why we are here and if we have a purpose in life that is more than simply contributing to the country's GNP. The spirit within us wants to know why the moon is so beautiful and why alone under a starlit sky we can feel a connection to something greater. Why do we love? Why do we help the refugee or care about the destitute?

When we find time to pause in this hectic world, the spirit within can sense there is a greater mystery to life and existence than all the 'how it works' messages of science.

Let us not be swamped by all the answers to how, but take time to consider the question 'Why?' The unchanging church might fade away but the human never will. We will always gather to acknowledge the spirit of life and we will always ask why. Let us not lose faith in a world that thinks it knows everything.

Tony McNeile



Prayer



 In our prayer let us find the inner strength to manage the path 
 towards midwinter. It's centre point is the silence and the 
 peace of the Christmas story. Let us fix our hearts on this silent 
 centre point and steer ourselves towards it. Our past may be 
 battered by weather - rain, snow, ice and coldness and maybe 
 emotional storms. Emotional storms are painful, and they can 
 bring divisions and arguments into our lives. In the wider 
 world truth is being mislaid amongst the conflicting headlines 
 on the newsstands and people ask, 'Who can we trust?'

 In our prayer let us trust the teachings of our scriptures that 
 perfection and peace is found in the unity of universal love. Let 
 us focus our minds on healing the divisions and rifts that sur- 
 round us. Focus on the sanctity of conscience that holds its 
 truth within us, that reminds us about what is right and what 
 seems to be wrong. Let us follow our conscience in all the de- 
 bates and arguments and speak its truth. Let our prayer be to 
 encourage that unity within ourselves. Let us move towards 
 the Christmas midwinter calmness of the story of peace and 
 goodwill whatever the weather and ride over all the storms 
 that threaten the sanctuary of our hearts.

 *Tony McNeile*



Dear NUF member.

At the Unitarian annual meetings next April, the NUF is running a workshop on the theme of developing the NUF as a spiritual community. We will be looking at ideas to promote our on-line presence and also to reach the people who do not go on-line but still have the same interests and needs as those who do. This will also address how we organize ourselves to meet these aspirations. I know from experience that not many of our NUF members are able to attend the annual meetings, but I would appreciate your thoughts on this subject and will welcome ideas that we can share through *News & Views* as we move forward. Please write or e-mail your thoughts on this to me.

Tony McNeile

Building bridges not barriers

By Nick Saunders

The first version of this article was written just before the outcome of the contest for leadership of the Conservative Party and the name of our new Prime Minister was made known. However, even before the result was declared we knew that whatever the outcome some people would be disappointed, some bitter and angry and even more people worried at what the future might hold – both in relation to BREXIT and more generally. In addition, we have the alarming prospect of ever more aggressive statements from Mr Trump, aimed at enemies, as he perceives them, both abroad and within the US. At a time of such polarised relationships, both amongst politicians and people, the need for people of goodwill to get together to stress those things that unite us rather than divide us seems greater than ever. This is well illustrated in the Unitarian postcard from which the

title of this article is taken. Why then are not Unitarian congregations growing rapidly rather than, in general, contracting?

One common explanation is that Unitarianism does not offer simple answers to the hard questions about belief in the way that many evangelical churches do. Rather we offer a way of looking at such questions and an inclusive and safe space within which individuals can come to their own conclusions. One danger with this response is that it can seem arrogant and dismissive of the views of those of a more evangelical persuasion, ignoring the facts that many such people will have their own doubts and that a dose of evangelical enthusiasm would be a much needed tonic for some Unitarian churches!

A broader answer would be that reaching out to others in a spirit of welcome is much easier to say than to put into practice. I suggest it needs six qualities:

1. Humility. We must genuinely believe that we do not have the monopoly of wisdom and that truth may be found in many different places, even within a faith and culture that we may find alien.
2. Knowledge. There is a continuing need to know more about other faiths and political viewpoints. Schools are now providing a broader approach to RE and citizenship education but what about the generations above, current children's parents and grandparents? TV and the media have a responsibility here to inform as well as entertain, but it should not be left entirely to them. Where are the adult education classes of yesteryear? The opportunities for churches and other organisations such as the U3A are enormous. Plymouth Unitarian Church has recently held a Delta course as an alternative to the Alpha course promoted by the mainstream Christian churches. This should be replicated elsewhere. Perhaps NUF could play a role here?

3. Empathy with adherents of other faiths and political viewpoints. This is harder than abstract knowledge and can really only come from knowing the people concerned. In many cases such people may be just as wary of us and our views as we are of them and theirs. I am just as reluctant to set foot in an Anglican communion service as my wife is to attend a Unitarian service!

4. Courage. It takes guts to stand up in a public meeting to challenge views perhaps clearly accepted by the majority of those attending. For example, I find it difficult to challenge in the presence of others the strongly expressed pro BREXIT views of a good friend whose commitment to the good of the local community I greatly respect.

5. Tact and diplomacy. These qualities are not “cool” and are often criticised as just being euphemisms for dishonesty and refusal to face up to reality. However, relationships between states cannot function without these qualities and those who are adept at using them, as the recent resignation of our ambassador to the US following criticism by Mr Trump makes clear. These qualities are just as needed in everyday life.

6. Humour! This is not to trivialise the importance of current issues, far from it. But we do need to keep a sense of proportion. There are some striking, counter-intuitive, facts which do not often get noticed. For example, recent surveys show that for all the sound and fury about BREXIT the average Brit is actually happier with their lot than citizens of most countries. The UK economy is still one of the largest in the world and most of us are, by international standards, well off. While the absurdity of some politicians’ antics may make satire harder than in the past, humour has an important role in keeping us grounded. A good (fictitious) example was in the recent Stephen Poliakoff drama series “Summer of Rockets” where an attempt-

ed coup by retired army officers and far right-wing sympathisers was stopped before it started by lampooning on TV. Carry on Private Eye I say...!

We all have these qualities in varying proportions so we will be far more effective if we come together to promote unity. We should welcome input from the widest variety of people. Young people with energy and new perspectives can make a particular contribution. As was recently pointed out by Wade Miller-Knight in the *Inquirer*, we are more likely to find new recruits in the ranks of non-church goers (now the majority of the population) rather than those attending other churches. Indeed, perhaps we need to ask whether we should call our fellowships “churches” at all. We need to keep an open mind to such changes, even if they seem radical. Being inclusive is not just a state of mind, it will take active steps, different in every community, although we can of course learn from others. The success of churches such as Bridport demonstrates this. A physical presence need not be large – a sponsored “Happy to Chat” bench might be a start – or perhaps even necessary. Could more be done with social media here?

I am sure I am not alone in hoping that as some of the uncertainties of BREXIT are resolved things may start to return to “normal”. But it would be foolish to think that we would return to a pre-Referendum position. Unitarians have an important role to play in helping to ensure that the new “normal” places the well-being of all, and not just those holding the views of the group currently in power, at the heart of decision making.

Nick Saunders is a member of Plymouth Unitarian Church and a committee member of NUF.

PHIL'S BOOK NOTES

The Self Illusion: Who do you think your are? By Bruce Hood
2011; 218 pages plus detailed notes.

I was drawn to the title as I am especially interested in the idea of selfhood. At first, I thought he was denying both the idea of an infinite self which exists before birth and goes on after, and also the idea that we have a permanent self during life. He does. But the illusion he talks about is the idea that we can ever fully know our evolving sense of self. As a developmental psychologist, he is well-aware of the ways in which each of us become self-aware as we age, but he is convinced that other people see many aspects of our personality that we do not, for various reasons. He does not ask us to look within to find our 'true' selves but to become more aware of the ways we behave in different situations, which are always changing, and to recognize the role of fallible memory in the construction of our sense of self.

This was a very stimulating read. I agree with much of what he says, but feel he underestimates the power of the individual to rise above the multitude of influences on our behavior; illusory in the sense of how imperfect our self-image may be, but it does influence our lives. The more we believe it, the more effective we can be – individually and collectively.

21 Lessons for the 21st Century by Yuval Noah Harari; 318 pages plus notes.

A friend lent me a copy of this and after reading a few chapters I decided to buy myself a copy so I could make notes as I went

along. It is set out in five sections and 21 chapters, with a focus on the current trends and immediate future. His first book was ***Sapiens***, exploring the past; his second was ***Homo Deus*** exploring the long-term future. In this one he focuses on current affairs and the immediate future, seeking the deep meaning of events, often in response to questions he has been asked. His approach is global, but the effects on individuals are included. He is well-aware of tremendous achievements and also of great errors and wants us to have a clearer awareness of what is going on and is likely to go on.

“This question is particularly poignant, because liberalism is losing credibility exactly when the twin revolutions in information technology and biotechnology confront us with the biggest challenges our species has ever encountered.” he tells us in the Introduction.

After sketching some of these challenges, he goes on to consider a wide range of potential responses. Then he shows how humans can successfully cope with these dangers if we keep our fears under control and be less dogmatic about our views.

Next, he explores truth in an age of fake news and encourages us to continue seeking understanding and morality.

In conclusion he asks us to develop a new story of human life to replace the outgrown ones from the past, one suitable to the age of 'bewilderment'. Finally, he urges us to avoid self-censorship and to freely engage in dialogue. Shall we become a new species of cyborgs? Can we control Artificial-Intelligence, so

it does not destroy us? Will we find a better way to accommodate differences and help all people to flourish?

This is a book worth reading, at least to clarify our own thoughts and feelings.

***Being Human: Bodies, minds, persons* by Rowan Williams 2018**

A friend and I heard him speak awhile back and Reg bought a signed copy of this book, which sold out before I could get one. He said he would lend it to me when he had finished it. Soon after, he gave it to me, saying he could not understand it. Being more of an academic and keen on the topic, I did read it and I tried writing a review but gave up. It is interesting, but he does not write as clearly as the two writers above. It was challenging also because he seems to have a unique approach to life.

In some ways he seems very modern, as far as I can tell, yet at the end he promotes a version of Christianity that does not, for me, follow. He seems to be a blend of reason and mystic. I am glad I read it and may read it again sometime; I certainly made many notes as I went along. I wish I could go through the book with him in person.

I am working on another, ***Soul Story***, by Tim Freake, which is very clear if unconventional in many ways. Part way through, but not rushing.

Phil Sillk

November Reflection www.ukunitarian.tv?nuf-nov19

‘Joy of music’

Along with many friends, the same age as me, I have begun to feel that our young people are living in a world uneasy with itself and uneasy with the way in which the human race has badly handled the great crisis of our time – Climate Change and Conflict at an international and national level. People are pitted against each other, and it must seem a very gloomy and hopeless place for our youngsters. Most of us share in their anxiety, and can only continue to encourage, those in positions of influence, to make good and just decisions, as we move forward and treat with kindness those who are affected.

However, there is still joy in this world and with joy comes hope. And where do I find hope and a space to be joyful, a place where barriers are broken down, a place which is life-enhancing? It is in music and the shared experience of making music with others, for others and listening to music by others. I don't care whether they march in the Extinction Rebellion protests, vote for or against BREXIT, whether they can sing or play in tune, although both of these do help. But in making music one has to be patient, find the way to listen and learn from others. But the reward is joyous, and I continue to hope that I can get better with practice.

The Unitarian movement is not only made up of congregations who meet in chapels, but also several societies and interest groups. The National Unitarian Fellowship offers a home for those who can't get to worship with other Unitarians, whether through infirmity or living far from a Unitarian Chapel. It is also a home for those who are exploring what being a Unitarian might mean for them before feeling ready to step inside a Unitarian place of worship, or even for those

who choose to make a permanent spiritual home through communion at a distance.

Another healthy Unitarian organization is the Unitarian Music Society, who meet each August for their annual conference, as well as publishing, twice a year, *Cantemus* which means 'Let us Sing'. It welcomes new members and non-members to the conference, and I never fail to be impressed by the wealth of musical talent, and the overflowing joy that exists between everyone, who is fortunate enough to attend.

In August we met at Great Hucklow for a long weekend learning about, and performing, music of the Elizabethan period as well as working on Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana*. Madrigals were sung, hand bells were rung, masks were made, dances were danced, recorders played, strings were bowed, woodwind and brass blown, and lute was plucked. Every space at the Centre was filled with musicians practicing; there was joy in abundance. For just a short time the world outside was forgotten.

We were fortunate to have a brief preview of next year's main work and were delighted to learn it is to be a piece entitled, *Oliver's Journey Home*, music by David Dawson and libretto by Nick Morrice, two of the key volunteers, who, along with others, make our annual meetings such a success. The piece is set in Yorkshire, around the area in which I grew up.

Music is a joy because it doesn't have to be a once a year activity, Music can so easily be incorporated into our daily lives, whether making music, listening to it or even just whistling while we work. If you can find a choir or a music group to join, I can assure you, not only will it bring you joy but also help to give balance to your life in difficult

times.

If you want to learn more about the Unitarian Music Society go to:

www.ukunitarian.org.uk/music

Joan Wilkinson

"Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht"

Christmas Tide always provides a ripple of excitement throughout the 'Christian world' and even though the orthodox view of this event is discarded by almost all of society it still holds its appeal. It is the birthday of a prophet, our prophet, since it is to his teachings that we owe our summary view of our most commonly held beliefs, and if the appointed birthday coincides with other celebrations of the rebirth of the sun and the coming rebirth of all life then so much the better; it adds to the potency of the celebration.

In our congregations nowadays we do not seek to worship some carefully explained divinity whose characteristics we have to learn, but rather to honour the matters and values that we hold to be most important in our lives; births, marriages, deaths. Together with society at large it seems that by common consent we all respect one of the holiest 'moments' or times in our lives, this is the birth of a child; no matter to whom, or how or where. So even today the holy birth of 'our' prophet still arouses deep feelings within us; that children should be nurtured, cared for, protected from the often alien evils of our society.

Over the centuries, from the very first communities within Christendom the 'stories' and myths of the birth have been told re-

told and acknowledged and much feeling, emotion and endeavour has been based upon these stories. As with most myths and religious stories the factual aspect is ignored since what is being addressed is one's inner understanding and emotions. Even the earliest written copy of the Gospel of Luke has its two first chapters added to Luke's original text, these presumably being birth stories circulating at the time. These accounts have led to the adoration of the Mother over the centuries, who is herself newly renovated in this country, in lady chapels and statuettes. Since worship usually requires a point of 'the divine', within ourselves, the image of a mother or mother and child may often be better understood and used rather than the image of a suffering saviour or a vengeful father.

And what greater stimulus to the emotions than the birth of a child in adverse circumstances, our literature provides many examples, and one of the earliest and strongest stories is from the gospels where the early hearers in European regions quickly understood the dangers fraught by travel and birth in winter. In early Europe where the weather in centuries past was much colder than today travel was difficult and hazardous; and life in winter relied upon secure homes with constant fires for all domestic life. Into this scene came the story of the Mother and Child in winter and everyone understood the constant predicament and the risks involved and how individuals could so easily be lost to the adverse elements.

Peter Brown

Evacuation

I

Travelling in the bus with Mum and Dad.
Feeling that I won't see them and my sister Gwyneth again.
But am too young to verbalise my feelings.

II

The bus stops.
We walk off the road and into the lane;
then onto a footpath through the woods.

We walk along the footpath.
After a while there is a clearing in the woods,
and there is the stone-built cottage
where my aunty, uncle and young cousin live.

There is a pump in the yard,
and a *'board and bucket' at the end of the garden.

There's a gap under the door.
If you can't see a person's feet you know that it's empty.
*'board and bucket' is an outside lavatory in the garden

III

The country lanes are full of Willow trees.
Hedges and ditches looked after by uncle.

He teaches me to make a bow and arrow.
What wood to select for the bow,
and what to select for the arrows.

For playing, I thought.

IV

The water is heated
in kettles and pans.

I am the youngest,
so am first in the bath.

It's bubbles and tickles,
and 'don't splash the water.'

Then it's my girl cousin,
and then it's my aunty.

My good-natured uncle,
all covered in chaff from his work on the farm,
is last in the bath.

V

My parents come to visit me.
My small mother is anxious;
exhausted after a week working in the munitions factory.
(She tries to avoid the 'board and bucket')

My father, his usual good-natured self,
is happy to be with his sister in the countryside again.

They are reassured I'm being kindly cared for.

VI

There's a bus once week
from the end of the lane.

Aunty has her best hat and coat on.

She knows the time,
but is late again.

She clutches my hand
as we run down the lane.

The bus driver feigns impatience
with a 'good morning Mrs H'.

Smiling,
Aunty greets the driver and her neighbours.
In the town,
we visit a bookshop.

Aunty selects an 'exciting boys' book'
to give me pleasure.

VII

'What's a magic lantern Aunty?'
"You'll see tonight" Aunty says.

The Village Hall is full – grown ups, old men and babies.

Then click, click, click and the film begins.
It's Charlie Chaplin with his funny walk and stick.

We all go quiet.
Suddenly, the lantern is alight.
The film stops and the lights go on.

We wait while the film is being magically repaired.

The lights go off,
and Charlie Chaplin walks across the screen.

We all cheer.

VIII

'Let's collect mushrooms for supper', Aunty says.

We go up to the field;
Aunty tells me which ones to pick.

We fill the baskets;
then back to the cottage
for bacon and mushrooms for supper.
At nine o' clock!

IX

'We're going to take Uncle his tea at the field', Aunty says.

It's harvest time;
and the fields are golden.

Uncle takes a break from the haymaking,
and we all sit in the shade.

Aunty spreads out a tablecloth on the grass.

We eat sandwiches and cake;
drink tea from the flask.

The long Summer is nearly over.

The Germans are dropping bombs in the fields,
so I'm to return home.

© Dennis Evans

Published 2018 by Celebration Press

in 'Occasional poems'

Music in my life by Ken Smith

As Richard Varley showed in his opening contribution to this series “Unitarians and the Creative Arts”, an attraction to the arts is often evident early in our lives; the interest chooses us rather than the other way around. My father said that my interest in music became clear to him on early visits to my maternal grandmother who had what is often called a cottage piano. Observing that no one in the family actually played it, and that it obviously attracted me, he arranged for the piano to be transferred to us.



Living in a seaside town he arranged for me to have lessons with the musical director of the local summer show – these continued for some years and I developed a repertoire of popular songs of the day. By the time I left the junior school to go to grammar school, I was sufficiently competent to play for morning school assembly. I have always derived more pleasure through playing with others than through solo performance. At the age of eleven I continued piano lessons with the organist of our local Congregational church and embarked on the ‘grades’ – a progressive series of study linked with yearly examinations of the Royal Schools of Music.

At secondary school I was persuaded that the school orchestra needed more cellists; I had initially hoped to learn the clarinet. There have been occasions when I wished I had held out for the clarinet; the bulky nature of the cello has its challenges on public transport, and it was to be many years before I acquired a car. Looking back I am glad that I opted for the cello; the bass department of the orchestra offers an excellent position from which to observe how the orchestra

‘functions’ as an ensemble. Our school had a complete orchestra and we could attempt works of the standard repertoire – Mozart’s *40th Symphony* and Schubert’s *Unfinished Symphony* to name two that we played before I ever heard them performed professionally.

Our director of music also conducted the local Gilbert and Sullivan society and I took part in the orchestral pit in performances of *Iolanthe* and *The Gondoliers*. When I entered the 6th form with three fellow pupils we formed a string quartet, a form of music making that still gives me great satisfaction – we even did a few ‘gigs’ and received modest financial reward for our efforts! The intimate musical conversation of four string instruments is a special kind of pleasure and when I now hear the quartets that we played then, performed (to a much higher standard I may add) I am very grateful for this early direct contact with some of the finest music ever written.

Partly because it provided me with an alternative to team games on sports afternoons, I joined the O Level and later the A level classes in music. That the study for these examinations had to be squeezed into a couple of lessons a week perhaps indicates the priority that the school placed upon music; that I managed results that were at least parallel or better than my timetabled academic subjects perhaps gave an indication that I had some talent in this direction and encouraged me to consider pursuing musical study beyond the end of school years. I was fortunate that a chance remark of my director of music pointed me in the direction of Dartington College of Arts – an institution sadly no longer based in its original home in Devon but subsumed in Falmouth University.

Dartington was a unique institution founded by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst in 1920 as a way of regenerating an estate that had suffered

from swinging death-duties imposed on its previous owners. Imogen Holst, daughter of the composer, had founded a small music school there in the 1950s that grew in the 1960s to a college of 200 students. It was thus a lot smaller than almost all higher education establishments of its day. Prior to going there my contact with choral music had been slight and the impact of the first choral rehearsal – of Britten's *St Nicholas Cantata* - is still strong in my memory fifty years later. The tuition, whose aim was to develop musicians who could be directors of music in secondary schools, was wide ranging. At that time, it was not a degree awarding institution, so our studies led only to a certificate of education conferred after we had done our third year at a college of education. However, we left having developed good competency in a wide variety of musical skills that we were able to deploy in schools.

One of the features of those years was the opportunity to work under the direction of leading visiting conductors – I especially remember a residency by George Malcolm, director of Westminster Cathedral choristers. An opportunity that occurred nearer to home was to play in the orchestra that accompanied the annual town carol concert conducted by (later Sir) Edward Heath just before he became Prime Minister – an event that he had started soon after he left the school that I attended.

Musicians, perhaps unlike other arts professionals, value paper qualifications and it became clear to me a few years into my teaching career that if I were to progress then I would need a clutch of these to assist me. Fortunately my initial training at Dartington had been good enough to enable me to acquire these by private study and taking the required exams, so that by 1975 I could append A.R.C.M. and B.Mus. after my name.

As I mentioned previously, the earlier that you develop an interest and ability in one of the arts the better; experience of secondary schools showed me that most pupils reached the age of eleven with very little experience of music making and even less knowledge. I decided that my skills would be better deployed with younger age pupils and I moved to a junior school where the previous teacher had developed an excellent wind band tradition. Carrying this work further as well as expanding choral singing gave me eight very happy years there as a teacher.

A wind or brass band is one of the easiest and most direct ways for the average young person to be involved in music making; much as I enjoy personally playing recorders, they no longer have the attraction to young people who are most likely to encounter 'pop' music in their everyday environment. Some schools have started to provide tuition in pop-group instruments; one of the limiting factors is that most pop-groups have a maximum of six members while a brass/wind band can absorb many more and there is a wealth of music open to ensembles of even modest accomplishment.

As a cellist I know that several years of lessons from a good teacher are required if pupils are to advance to the same standard that can be achieved by brass and wind players in a much shorter period of time. Whether one seeks to establish a band or an orchestra in a school, one of the hardest challenges is to get a tradition of playing established; this applies to all music making, be it instrumental or choral – success breeds success and once this is under way there will soon be no shortage of pupils wishing to learn.

Learning the piano can be a lonely discipline,; the sooner the pupil can join in simple duets or play a hymn tune to accompany singing,

the swifter will progress be achieved. Some Unitarian chapels are of a perfect size and arrangement to host concerts by young people and it is surprising that in many cases congregations do not appear to have any relations with the wide community through this means. Re-searching the history of my own chapel recently I came upon reports of how a former minister had established a string orchestra just before WW1 that enjoyed great success in the area. Sadly, it did not seem to endure beyond his departure.

One form of vocal music making that gave me great pleasure for a few years was singing in a barbershop harmony chorus. This is a form of male four-part harmony singing in which the main tune is sung by second to top voice in the choir, with the other voices placed above or below. It is a contrast to the traditional male voice choir both in arrangement and repertoire. The songs are mainly sentimental songs from the USA, usually learned by rote and in addition require the singers to add 'stage presence' in the form of movement to the performance. Great attention is paid not only to accurate intonation from the performers but also to matching performance uniforms. The best barbershop groups achieve impressive musical results and provide a valuable contrast to the more staid performances of male voice choirs.

For a number of reasons, I have never learned to play the organ – an omission in my musical career that sometimes I regret. That my father encouraged me from a young age to play the piano I am forever grateful; were I to have a pound for every time someone has remarked to me in later years that they wished they had persevered with piano lessons, I would be very rich indeed. It has led me into diverse musical activities – from playing for a ladies' ballet class to playing in an evangelical church worship band. To borrow the title of Ger-

ald Moore's autobiography, I am happy to remain an 'unashamed accompanist'.

The Unitarian denomination has an excellent musical society (UMS) and I have thoroughly enjoyed their annual conferences at Great Hucklow. The skilled guidance of David Dawson, the Musical Director, has led us through weekends devoted to Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, *Trial by Jury* and Faure's *Requiem*. Considering that our denomination is really very small it is remarkable that we have achieved such results.

As far as music in Unitarian services is concerned, the traditional free church 'hymn sandwich' – four or five hymns interspersed with readings, is often the liturgical norm. The size and talents of the congregation may allow considerable variation to this outline, especially where the service schedule includes a communion service. The first congregation of which I was a member always sang a setting of the Prayer of Jesus near the end of the service. The small size of most Unitarian congregations precludes the inclusion of much choral music as a regular feature. However, the two recent Unitarian hymn books; *Hymns for Living* (1985) and *Sing Your Faith* (2009) have been a very welcome addition to worship. The lighting and extinguishing of the chalice is a regular part of worship in most Unitarian congregations; apart from David Kent's *Chalice Meditations* and the eleven rounds at the end of *Sing Your Faith*, there are few musical settings easily available for this part of our worship. Some of our chapels are blessed with fine organs and even more blessed if there are good organists to play them .

My own chapel always makes a big effort with its yearly carol service and we have had enough singers to form a choir on several occasions; theological difficulties tend to be put to one side and we feel free to

explore the whole range of festive music. No doubt we all have our favourite carols – for me Harold Darke’s setting of *In the bleak mid-winter* is unsurpassed in its word setting and the festive season is not complete if I have not sung (or at least heard) it. Christmas also affords the opportunity to add descants to the familiar congregational carols; the addition of Willcocks’ splendid melodies to the last verse of *Hark the Herald* and *O Come All Ye Faithful* still induce a thrill in me each year as if I were hearing them for the first time.

One of the benefits of the freedom that Unitarians enjoy from their openness to different worship forms is the opportunity to include a wide variety of musical accompaniment. For the last few years my own chapel has developed a ukulele group that has played during services on several occasions. We’ve also been fortunate to have the talents of a small group of skilled brass players at our Christmas carol services.

Although I have great respect for the silent worship of the Quakers, music is an indispensable part of religious worship for me. Over the years I have sung in both Roman Catholic and Anglican services; a well sung choral evensong in a great cathedral is a great pleasure both musically and liturgically. Many NUF members may not often be able to attend worship and they may be interested to know that there are a number of complete services available to view on the internet as well as CDs of hymns recorded by the Unitarian Music Society for listening or providing recorded accompaniment for small groups where no accompaniment is possible.

Our two main hymnbooks – *Hymns for Living* and *Sing Your Faith* – are splendid compilations that make the task of planning worship pleasurable and easier, especially for those of us who only occasional-

ly lead worship. I particularly value the Universalist flavoured hymns of the late John Storey in *Hymns for Living*. The collection of *Sing Your Faith* is happily enriched by items from writers like Andrew Hill, Cliff Reed and Peter Sampson who are still very much with us. Diverse though Unitarians may be in theology, we are fortunate in having hymnals that are comprehensive in their coverage to enrich our services of worship.

Ken Smith



Unitarians, the Arts and Human Creativity.

By Lyanne Mitchell

I believe there is a direct link between human Creativity and Health.



Leaving Unitarianism aside for the moment...what does science have to say about the health benefits of creativity?

Medical research appears to be divided on this issue.

A lot of research in the medical field has suggested that being creative — is useful for our mental and physical well-being. A number of studies have also found that expressive writing, drawing, painting, music making and all kinds of expressive crea-

tivity can help people to overcome trauma and manage negative emotions.

Music therapy has immune system-boosting effects, as well. Music affects our brains in complex ways, stimulating the limbic system and moderating our response to stressful stimuli.

So if we, human beings can bring some order to our mental or physical states just by keeping journals, smudging paint, or learning to play the guitar, why not take advantage of that and welcome more creativity into our lives?

What is the other side of the argument?

It has been proposed that there is a particular link between creativity and mental illness (e.g. bipolar disorder) whereas major depressive disorder appears to be significantly more common among playwrights, novelists, biographers and artists).

Creatives tend to be emotional people. They tend to *feel* everything first and more keenly. They are sensitive and often have a limited 'filter' of external stimuli. In contrast, others may be able to ignore or block out a lot of incoming information.

Research doesn't fully resolve the long-running questions about whether and how mood disorders and creativity are linked, but it does pour water on some perspectives, such as expecting those struggling with a disorder to thrive creatively. It's an important reminder that if we accept that "creative people tend to get blue," this does not imply that "being blue, tends to make us creative".

Now, I am not a scientist. My professional background is Graphic Design, including teaching this subject within Further Education. Speaking from personal experience, I firmly believe that creativity, in all its forms, flows through human beings as a channel of living *energy*. In some mysterious way, I think our energy can act like a magnet, attracting a similar energy in others, whether that be positive or negative.

How we choose to *use* our energy is, I believe, the key to our quality of life, health and happiness. If human beings' natural creative energy becomes blocked and for some reason they are unable to use this creative channel to express themselves, then they may become ill. (Anyone who has knowledge of the sacred Energy Centres - the Chakras - and who knows something about Reiki healing will identify with this.)

The Unitarian movement has no shortage of creative individuals, both famous and unknown. Over hundreds of years, the Unitarian belief in liberal ways of thinking, free from dogma and religious creeds, has influenced famous, ground-breaking thinkers and scientists. Of course, creativity takes many widely diverse forms which do not necessarily need to 'rock the world'! The list is endless - music, art, crafts, poetry, cooking, gardening, dancing, photography, all kinds of writing....down to humble everyday initiatives within a church community or 'family' such as planning events, flower arranging, leading services...or just suggesting new ideas and original thinking.

If you will allow me to stray a bit 'off the beaten track' but without losing the link to health issues.....let me suggest this analogy :-

It features two groups - Practitioners of Complimentary Medicine and Unitarians.

Naturopaths and Nature Cure Practitioners believe that their patients should take full responsibility for their own health and well-being. They are expected to be willing to change their lifestyles, perhaps dramatically, if required. Healing is seen as a holistic process, involving mind, body and spirit - rather than a set of symptoms to be masked by pills and medication. The kind of patient who chooses this type of healing is likely to be less dependent on commonly prescribed medication by their GPs and may even feel that the NHS is far too dependent on the huge and powerful pharmaceutical drug companies who keep it supplied.

Unitarians, on the whole, have chosen this liberal faith-path, in order to be free to think for themselves. They believe that they should take full responsibility for their own spiritual growth and beliefs. They do not wish to be confined or restricted by the rules of any religious creed. They embrace an *independent* mind-set and enjoy the challenge of working things out for themselves in the company of fellow like-minded thinkers.

Creativity, as it is expressed within all the Arts, is the stuff of Free Spirits. Artists of all kinds down the ages, have been rule

breakers, innovators, original and lateral thinkers - inspired and unafraid to work well outside the bounds of convention.

In my own life, I know that some form of creative activity, no matter how mundane, is essential for me on a daily basis if I am to stay happy, healthy and well. I may be retired, but I am involved in a number of creative initiatives both for my church and within my community. These include - being on a rota to play (organ) for services ; occasionally leading worship; designing and managing websites (with technical assistance!); designing covers for our monthly newsletter; volunteer designer for my local museum; singing in my local community choir; among other voluntary initiatives. Even the smallest creative job - eg just writing a letter - can give a sense of satisfaction. It is hard to describe, but I know that somehow, deep inside, my 'creative energy channel' must stay open and continue to flow.

I wonder if you will agree with me that to be a Unitarian AND to be a creative human being, involves refusing to 'follow the crowd' but requires an individual and rather independent type of mind?

Robert Burns was no stranger to liberal thinking. He was far from being the rustic, self-taught 'Ploughboy Poet' he rather encouraged and enjoyed as his popular image! His father had seen to it that he had a classical education despite the Burns family's extremely limited income. He was encouraged to think creatively - as his large legacy of poems and songs displays.

Robert wrote the following lines as an Inscription for an Alter of Independence :-

*'Thou of an independent mind
With soul resolved, with soul resigned;
Prepared Power's proudest frown to brave,
Who will not be, not have a slave;
Virtue alone who dost revere,
Thy own reproach alone dost fear -
Approach this shrine, and worship here.'*

Couldn't this be a fitting inscription for a Unitarian church or chapel?

As I said before...I am no scientist...neither am I a poet! However I am able to turn my hand to writing lyrics set to inspiring melodies. I am honoured to have my lyrics included in 'Sing your Faith' (Hymn Number 147). I would have preferred its title to be '**Living Energy**' but it was listed alphabetically, as '*Spirit of Earth, Root, Stone and Tree*'. I set the words to the lovely traditional Highland tune '*The Leaving of Lismore*'.

These lines really sum up my deep belief in keeping our channels of creative energy open and flowing free in order to nurture our physical and spiritual sense of well-being. I believe this is essential in order to help us to be happy, healthy individuals.

Here is the final verse and chorus :-

'Spirit of Life - you are my song

*Sing in my soul, all my life long
Gladden and guide me,
keep me from wrong
Inspire me with sacred energy.*

*Spirit of Nature, healing and free
Spirit of Love, expanding in me
Spirit of Life, breathe deeply in me
Inspire me with living energy.'*

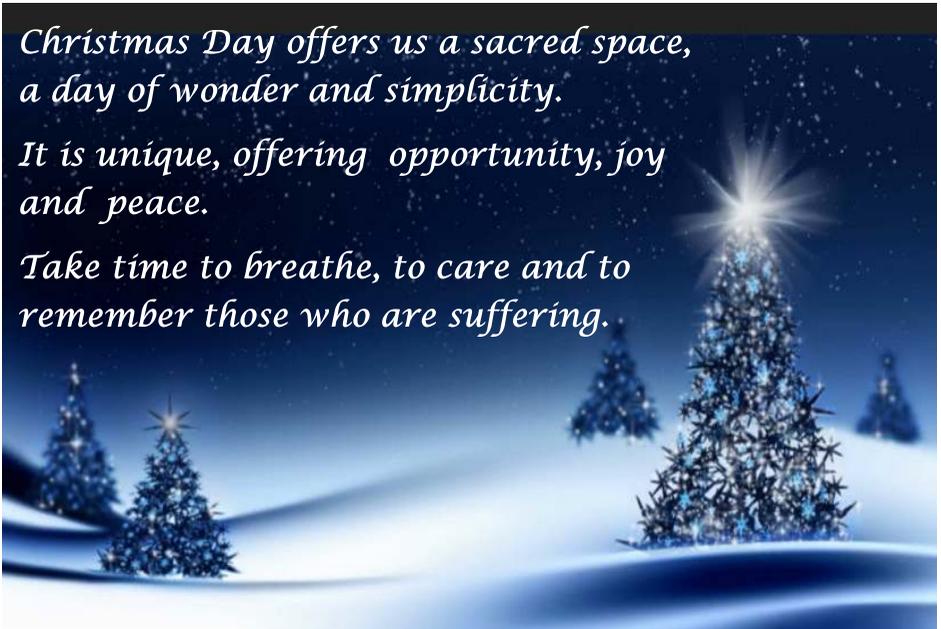


Lyanne Mitchell

*Christmas Day offers us a sacred space,
a day of wonder and simplicity.*

*It is unique, offering opportunity, joy
and peace.*

*Take time to breathe, to care and to
remember those who are suffering.*



National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Linking those who value Freedom, Reason and Tolerance in Religion

Contacts

President: Mr. Howard Wilkins, 46 Brookside,
Burbage, Hinckley, Leics, LE10 2TL
Tel: 01455 635 043 email: president@nufonline.org.uk

Secretary: Ms. Janet Lythgoe, Inglemere, New Chapel Lane,
Horwich, Bolton, BL6 6QX
Tel: 01204 695582 email: nuf@nufonline.org.uk

Treasurer & Membership Sec:
Mr. Ken Smith, 12 Gravel Road,
Church Crookham, Fleet, Hampshire, GU52 6BB
Tel: 01252 628320 email: kennethsmith939@gmail.com

Minister: Rev. Tony McNeile, 102 Turton Road,
Bradshaw, Bolton, BL2 3DY
Tel: 01204 591 570 email: tony.mcneile@virgin.net

Books of Fellowship: Mrs. Pat Caddick, 10 Park Lane,
Castle Donington, Derby, DE74 2JF

Distributor: Mr. Derek Harvey, Flat 2, 34 Broomsgrove Road,
Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S10 2LR

News & Views Editor: Mrs. Joan Wilkinson, 10 Shirley Close,
Castle Donington, Derby DE74 2XB
Tel: 01332 814055
email: joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk

Co-Editor: Nick Saunders

Charity Reference No 1040294