

# identity



## St Mary's Matters

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When considering the idea of ‘identity’ one can ask any number of people for their thoughts and get very different replies. There are those who insist that we are predestined to be the way we are by our genetic make up, those who will say it is our experiences in life that shape who we are. And then to complicate the matter further there are those who suggest we have no individual identity, that our beliefs of individuality are an illusion, and that we are all one, along with everything else in the universe. The latter group cites current scientific thought, especially in the field of quantum physics, to back up these concepts.

In this edition of our magazine there are some writings that support some of these notions. However there are many pieces here that are quite different. The mix makes for an interesting read.

I hope you enjoy this edition’s content. I am always very happy to receive feedback about what you like or do not like in our magazine.

Marg Ortiz (Editor)

# Behind Our Faces.

The young woman slumped at my desk. With a sense of despair she told me how, as a young University student, her hopes and dreams of a successful career, romance and marriage, gradually became a nightmare as her husband became increasingly disparaging, emotionally abusive and critical of everything she did until her self-esteem was shattered. ‘I don’t know who I am any more’ she cried.

Flexing his muscles, and with an air of defiance and suppressed aggression, the sixteen year old boy applying for a ‘homeless youth payment’ told me in colourful language of his mother’s rejection of him in favour of her string of boyfriends who frequented their home. His anger for his mother was palpable, until after some conversation, I suggested that perhaps underneath it all he really loved his mother. Rubbing his hands through his hair, with tears in his eyes, his mask slipped and he nodded his reluctant agreement.

Who are you? Who am I? Do we hide our identity behind social masks? How well do we really know and value each other?

Various philosophers, religions and psychologists have posed different and often opposing theories about the self, or personal identity. Buddhism claims that self is an illusion, Jung that Self is synonymous with the Soul, and psychologists such as Maslow, that personal identity is a reality achieved through individuation and self-actualization.

Rightly or wrongly, in our modern society, we have placed great stress on personal identity and self-esteem, and on being authentic. Although we may often distinguish between our ‘real’ self and our ‘social’ self, it is true that the real self is not a fixed, permanent identity. Being a person implies a dynamic process, a state of constant change, of becoming. It is learned from



our earliest interaction with our mother and continues throughout life.

For many clients that I have encountered as a social worker and counsellor, patterns of behaviour developed as a protection against pain and vulnerability have become so self-deceptive that the individuals have forfeited all sense of identity and integrity. They are roles, masks and players of games. Harry Stack Sullivan, an eminent psychiatrist, propounded the theory that all personal growth, all personal damage and regression, as well as all personal healing comes through our relationship with others.

‘What I am, at any given moment in the process of my becoming a person, an identity, will be determined by my relationships with those who love me or refuse to love me, and those whom I love or refuse to love.’

This highlights the importance of community. It is in a community of caring members that each self should feel validated, valued, assisted and supported to change, heal and grow, to express who we are, that is, what we think, judge, feel, value, love, fear, hope for, are committed to. Each of us can be helped to grow and express our true identity, our true self through truly loving, non-judgemental, caring friendships.

To achieve this we need to learn to listen empathetically with our ears, our eyes, our minds and our hearts. Unfortunately unless we move beyond it, cliché conversation, often our experience in a large community such

as ours - ‘How are you?’ ‘How is your family?’, ‘I like your outfit’ etc, prevents us really sharing with each other. Everyone remains safely in isolation, unknown and unknowing.

This is so well expressed in the lyrics of Paul Simon in *Sounds of Silence*

*And in the naked night I saw  
Ten thousand people, maybe more,  
People talking without speaking,  
People hearing without listening,  
People writing songs that voices  
never shared,  
No one dared  
Disturb the sounds of silence.*

It is unbelievably rewarding to listen to another’s story, to hear of their dreams and disappointments, and reciprocally to reveal something of yourself, and in doing so to build trust and acceptance of each other. Through this encounter each of us has the opportunity to grow and experience our changing and unfolding identity. In doing so, our community is enriched by an expanding appreciation of the qualities and values of the individuals within it, by the enhanced relationships and growing trust between the members of the community, and a sense that this is a place where we feel safe, where we can reveal ourselves, be valued, and seek healing and growth in a place where we truly have become one.

Who am I?

Your perception of me may be an illusion. Delve a little deeper and learn something of my changing and growing identity.

Who are you?

Let us share something of your self. We promise to value that, and to hold it in respectful and sacred trust, and as you open yourself to us, we will become more authentic to you.

*Continued on page 5*

## Ask Me Who I Am Today.

For David who asked the question

Today I am a butterfly  
the tracery of my wings redder than the rowan berry  
decorative markings as striking as the winter night sky,  
I am released through the eye  
of a multi-hued dragon.

I say goodbye for a while  
to the ruby breastplate  
to the crimson scaly body  
yet even in these tiny fragile wings  
I carry the infinite power of the Universe  
for when I alight on you  
I invoke the wisdom you have held  
since the day that you were born.

Later, when my day is over  
I will fall back through the dragon's open eye  
far down into the fire in its belly  
where the violet flame gave birth to the Earth herself  
and there amidst amethyst-red, indigo-red flares  
I will be extinguished only to rise again  
as a scarlet phoenix,

my four red feathers standing proudly in my tail.  
After I emerge from the dragon's crystalline mouth,  
carried forward on the heat of its exhalation,  
I will fly without ceasing around the equator  
calling to those who will hear  
singing to those who are sad  
delivering healing tears to those who are sick.

Once my circuit is complete I will return  
to the fire and be cremated in its ashes.

Then, neither phoenix nor butterfly,  
I will be once more the dragon  
and when I move the whole Earth will shudder,  
stars will shake in the skies  
and the Wise Ones who went before  
will incline their heads in recognition.

My reach will extend to the edges of the Universe  
and the scorching of my breath will causes chaos in  
the atmosphere  
I will roar out my carnelian-red, carmine-red,  
magenta-red flames  
and my force will be felt in every particle of life  
before a stillness settles on me.  
Then a tiny, red butterfly will stir,

flutter gently, tentatively, behind my eyes  
and I will feel it gather strength and rise  
up, out and away.

Fionnuala Smyth



## This is Not One of Them.

The editor of the St Mary's Matters Magazine, Marg Ortiz, has asked me to write something for her to put in the magazine's 'Identity' edition. Something of what David Carse said in his book *Perfect Brilliant Stillness* makes an appropriate foundation for some thoughts on this topic. Carse writes 'this book, and the thoughts and concepts expressed here, are not copyrighted. They are not 'mine', understanding or misunderstanding, interpreting or misinterpreting, quoting or misquoting, using or misusing, appropriating or misappropriating may or may not occur. All is Presence, Awareness, in which all apparent thoughts and concepts, events and actions arise spontaneously.'

He writes in the fine print 'There are many books out there that will help you live a better life, become a better person and evolve and grow to realize your full potential as a spiritual being.

This is not one of them.'

He adds 'the subject matter is such that a very few will be interested in it. What is written about here, if it is really understood, is so genuinely strange that it is on the far edge of what the normal human brain can comprehend or accept. I wouldn't have understood it myself, or found it interesting before what happened in the jungle.'

If you read it anyway, and what is hinted at here resonates and is by some remote chance followed to its end than that will also be the end of you. So, a

warning. With any luck, you will not come back from this with a life you can call your own; 'you' will not come back at all.

That said – enjoy!

In Chapter thirteen, entitled *Deliverance* Carse quotes Jesus of Nazareth 'whoever discovers the true meaning of these sayings will never die: Let the speaker not stop seeking until he finds. And when he finds, he will be greatly troubled, he will be astonished, and he will reign over the All' (from the *Gospel of Thomas*).

In chapter twenty-six entitled *Dream Machine* Carse quotes Lao Tzu, 'He who knows does not speak, he who speaks does not know.'

So I 'Peter' should not be writing this. That said let me quote Carse again 'There is a stunningly beautiful simplicity to it all. You can say Awakening is the Understanding that there is no one to awaken. There is no individual here doing anything. Consciousness is all there is.' 'And' Carse adds 'you will have expressed the totality of the teaching. That's really all there is to this. All of this is simply is. There is no individual, no seeker, not teacher, no purpose, no outcome. It all simply IS. All that is is Presence. That's it, that's the whole shebang. Done, completed. And the dream goes on.'

So with this understanding, enjoy it. Get up, have breakfast, go to work. Do what seems right to do, knowing there is no 'you' and 'you' aren't doing anything.



So the Zen saying has it, 'If you understand – things are just as they are. If you do not understand – things are just as they are' I will end this with a quote by Robert Adams from Chapter four entitled *Prologue*,

'I can assure you there is no such thing as God, there is no such thing as creation, and there's no such thing as the universe. So there's no such thing as the world, and there's no such thing as you. There's no such thing as 'I'. So what is left?

Silence!'

Peter Kennedy

PS if any of this resonates with you, read the book. But you will need to do more than that read it. Allow it to enter the heart. The mind cannot help you. There are no answers, so it's pointless asking questions, 'Be still and know that I am' PPS Watch a Ted Talk on U tube entitled *Science and Spirituality* by Jeff Lieberman

## Behind Our Faces

Continued from page 3

Who are we?

We perceive SMX as a caring and inclusive community, but we can be much more. We can develop a unique identity where each member of the community feels understood, valued, and safe and where each has the opportunity to develop our full potential'.

'The fully human person is in deep and meaningful contact with the world outside of him.

He not only listens to himself, but to the voices of his world. The breadth of his own individual experience is infinitely multiplied through a sensitive empathy with others. He suffers with their suffering, rejoices with the joyful. He is born again in every Springtime, feels the impact

of the great mysteries of life: birth, growth, love, suffering, death. His heart skips along with the 'young lovers' and he knows something of the exhilaration that is in them. He also knows of despair, the loneliness of suffering without relief, and the bell never tolls without tolling in some strange way for him.' (John Powell. *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You who I Am?*)

Dorothy Aldred

# I Am That, I Am.



Recently, I joined some friends to watch a DVD entitled *The Moses Code* by James Twyman. It impressed me so much that I will draw from this to begin and end my reflections on the topic of 'Identity'.

The Code is in the comma (,) The visual is the Burning Bush. The Voice Message proclaims The Truth: 'I am That I am'.

It is The Truth about everything: God is in me, God is in you, in everyone, everything and in every situation. 'If God is already in everything, then everything is unto Glory': Richard Rohr. Can we see the symbolism of 'the Burning Bush?' It is said that we are spiritual beings having a human experience. Our human experience is not consumed, yet if we could see the ultimate Reality, we would see only 'That' manifesting as..... when Jacob woke up he said: 'Surely, God was in this place and I never knew.' Genesis.

Recently I was reading 'The End of Your World' by Adyarsanti and I identified

with what was written. In fact the world seems full of mirrors. I can identify with the suffering of 'not knowing' with its multifarious expressions, as well as the multifarious manifestations of the blessedness 'of knowing'. What a blessing when the awakening to the one True Identity dawns with certainty. In the Light of The One that is, every mirror reflects an aspect of the wholeness which is the True Identity of everything. More and more (it seems) the form of the bush becomes transparent with the falling away of false identities.

Without my revelation Experience I think the 'God is in...' would be dismissed easily.

'We are made in the Image of God.' How could that be if I hadn't experienced the fullness of God extending and returning to the Source – seemingly, a Trinity, yet the One Wholeness Being? Giving and receiving go together. By extending, Love knows what it is like to be both 'The Lover', as well as 'The Beloved' - knowing Its

Oneness in all Its infinite qualities and expressions.

'The Light of Love is all there really is to see.' (*A Course in Miracles Lesson 224*)

'Be ye perfect even as your Heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). How could I comprehend if I believed that I was more separated from God than myself to a worm or holiness is to sinfulness? I needed to know that The True Self is inseparable with the very Holiness and perfection of God.

The voiceless words of Jesus remain branded on my soul: 'At least, you now know your True Self. Your Life is mine, My Life is yours. We share the One 'Identity!'

Even when 'forms' disappear the One voice will still proclaim:

'I am That, I am.'

*Barbara Fingleton*

# What if?

## Could man made Identity be the cause of every crisis situation we face as a global family.

John Lennon's song *Imagine* comes to my mind immediately.

*Imagine there's no country  
It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion too  
Imagine all the people living life in peace,  
You may say I'm a dreamer  
But I'm not the only one  
I hope some day you'll join us  
And the world will be as one  
Imagine no possessions  
I wonder if you can  
No need for greed or hunger  
A brotherhood of man  
Imagine all the people sharing all the world.*

'Imagine'...is one of those timeless songs that millions of us identify with. At our core, at a subconscious level we all know that we are one with each other and yet we grow up desperately wanting to identify with someone, something, some religion, some country, some school, uniform, job, etc.

It is ingrained in us from the moment we are born and given a name. That is the first identification we are given by our parents. We are then given ID cards in school, Passports, TFN's, ABN's, etc. Our whole world is based on identity. In fact it is hard to imagine a world without identity. As humans we have created identity. It is therefore of the mind. It is man made.

As humans we have created identity. It is therefore of the mind. Identifying with something implies that there is another thing whether it be a person, a country, a school, a community etc. This generally arouses competition. Competition then gives rise to fear.

And so we could deduce that Identity causes fear. Ironically Identity also



alleviates fear. We hold onto our identities like crutches.

Fear is the opposite of love. And fear is the root cause of every crisis situation in our world today.

### Identifying with Love

According to all the mystics, at our core we are simply Love or God or whatever name you want to give it. Now that again is identity. Is it not?

There is the difference though... The word Love cannot be defined with any number of words or adjectives. It is therefore by nature boundless. And if we are Love then perhaps we are boundless too. All one.

What if we could just be content with saying. 'I am', which is boundless instead of 'I am Carolyn', which has me contained or 'I am Catholic' or 'I am Australian' etc.

What if we could just Be. What if we could just 'Be Still and know that we are am God'. Be still in the mind What would happen then? Could we possibly know and experience ourselves as Love?

And what would happen then? Perhaps we would experience everyone and everything as Love and God too! And what would happen then? Perhaps we would see ourselves in each other and each other in ourselves. And what would happen then? Perhaps we would all be in service to each other and to the healing of our world.

And what would happen then? Perhaps we would all experience heaven here on earth. Perhaps that is what this whole human experience is all about: to experience Heaven here on Earth.

There is another aspect to consider here and that is this. The reason many of us have difficulty in just being still in our minds is perhaps because we have collected so much identity along the way. We carry so much weight around. Sometimes we refer to it as personality types or numbers on the enneagram etc. And our identity has a devious purpose to protect us from being vulnerable, from being open and authentic, from being boundless, from simply being love: that which we all are. So how then do we experience ourselves as Love, boundless, identity less our true nature?

One way would be to embark upon the journey of the dark night of the soul, to be able to eventually shed our identity and discover the diamond that lies at the core of our being. That diamond is what we truly are, Love.

And when we experience ourselves as diamonds, we would unconsciously be a light for everyone we encounter. The likes of Jesus, Mother Teresa, Gandhi etc. Great souls that we will never forget.

It takes courage to embark upon the journey of the dark night of the soul. It is much easier to hold onto our identities, our armour, our comfort zones. It keeps us feeling secure. A false sense of security. Many of us exit this human journey without experiencing our true nature because we are too scared to be armour-less. However it is in our defencelessness that our safety lies. (*A principle from 'A course in Miracles'*)

We need to share our stories of how we came to identify with whatever we identify with. And when we are able to do this from a place of authenticity

and vulnerability we will discover the commonalities we have. It is in the intersection of our stories that we will slowly remember that we are all in fact ONE and perhaps start treating each other as brothers and sisters.

I remember as a young girl in India. On my way to school, I used to encounter a string of beggars that sat on the street with beaten up aluminium bowls to collect money. I was fourteen at the time and I remember feeling pained by all the injustices I saw all around me. It is everywhere in India. Blatant, right there in your face. I could not help but ask myself those existential questions. Why was I born? Why all this injustice? What is the purpose of life?



I had no one to talk to at the time and so those questions used to haunt me. I did not know what I could do to alleviate the pain of those beggars or rather if I could do anything at all. My pocket money was fifty paisa a week - the equivalent of fifty cents.

I was told at a young age that I had a beautiful smile and so I decided that was something I could give those beggars. So each day I would leave early to go to school so nobody would be around, sit down at road level, look straight into their eyes and smile at them. Something passed between us in those few seconds which gave me great solace and which made me feel that I was no different from them, I guess I experienced my oneness with them in the moments when our eyes met and there was no separation between us. That made me feel so much better. I would give one beggar five paisa each week. On my way home from school as I walked home with the other girls, I would be greeted by this line of beggars with the brightest smiles coming back at me. I remember my friends asking... Why are they smiling at you.?

*Carolyn Vincent*

## Who Am I – Really?

When I was born seventy one and a half years ago, three months premature, weighing two pounds nine ounces, around one and a quarter kilograms and not expected to live, I made it somehow! I was literally just a bundle of cells and energy. I could breathe (just), smell, wriggle, gurgle, open and shut my eyes, sleep a lot; my complex biochemistry was working, as was my heart, nervous system and expulsion systems. These are givens; they just happen. Their technical name is implicit memory.

My parents gave me a name, indeed at least two names, 'Brian O'Hanlon'; also a dependency which attached to my mother's support. I was fortunate my mother was very nurturing, attentive and warm to me. Even though my parents did not get on well together, I generated an implicit feeling of comfort and calmness. I am conscious of this feeling even today. Some in the community at large are not so lucky; they develop a survival alarm anxiety. But I have a comfortable feeling attached to my name.

Then there are the ongoing experiences of life. Of particular importance are the early years with my family as I sense their support, love and discipline and I begin to gain a sense of what my family is like and where I fit into it. Somewhere between ages five and seven I gradually gain a sense that I am Brian, an individual separate person, connected to this social complex group of people and siblings I call family. This is my baseline of who I am. Added to my baseline over the years are my memories of my schooling experiences, my sport experiences, my art experiences, my religious experiences, my romantic experiences, my marriage and primary family experiences, my academic experiences, my professional experiences, my spiritual experiences and my retirement experiences. As well there are my expectations for the future. In short this is my personal history attached as memories to my (strong) sense of individuality and separation. So, is this my identity, is this who I am? Some say I am the totality of my past.

If my personal history can determine my identity/who I am, I still have a few nagging questions. Why am I here? How did I get here? Did I have any influence any say in arriving here? In the 1980's a scientists' response to the big question, 'how did I get here?' would have been, 'it just happened, it was chance', (not very scientific). Fortunately modern day scientists have some idea about just how difficult it is for the Universe to arise from the Big Bang, let alone for complicated life forms like us, Homo sapiens to emerge out of the primordial Big Bang soup. Modern day scientists have concluded that it is near impossible. Yet, here we are! Furthermore and a little beyond the boundaries of science, they suggest, there is some form of a Guiding Hand, some form of a Guiding Intelligence influencing the evolving Universe. Indeed a leading scientist has concluded that his atheistic preference is seriously challenged by modern scientific ideas and information.

The Religious traditions have many names for the 'Guiding Hand'; the Abrahamic Religions, Christians, Jews, and Moslems call it Spirit (God). Jesus said to the woman at the well 'God is Spirit'. The Buddhists call it Buddha mind; the Taoists call it the Tao; the Hindus call it Brahman or Atman. All of the traditions conclude that this Guiding Hand, Spirit is deeply within me, (and each one of us), and that my Spiritual nature is my true identity. Pierre de Cardin says that 'we are spiritual beings on a human journey'. Could this be the fundamental nature of my identity; who I am?

Maybe there are two of me, two identities. There is my personal history self: that which I have become, and there is my true self, my Spiritual Essence. After all I do have two brains; the left and the right hemispheres are very different. Maybe I have two natures, 'that which I have become and that which I truly am'.

Perhaps my identity is a process; My DNA origins and personal history provide me with a sense of self, a sense of separation, and a sense of time, past



*We are formally named at our baptism.*

and future, a sense of my ego; yet there seems the Presence of a 'Guiding Hand' as our brains slowly evolve towards a Spiritual awakening. A few souls of history have shown us the way: Jesus of Nazareth, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Saint Paul, and from our Christian tradition, Mister Eckhart, Saint John of the Cross, and John Main. Modern day Spiritual leaders of the Christian tradition include Father Laurence Freeman and Father Willigis Jager. Modern secular leaders include Eckhart Tolle, Leonard Jacobson and Hameed Ali. They all wish for us to follow them.

So, I start with my DNA inheritance and I gather my personal history experiences. This is who I have become. Perhaps the self 'who I have become' is a necessary starting point. Perhaps I need my individual identity, as a means of questioning and challenging myself, to search for a deeper sense of reality, and truth. I know for myself, many years ago I started out with an intense curiosity, wondering, 'what is Spirituality'? What indeed would allow me to evolve to my Spiritual identity, my true self? After all, our modern, intense, speedy, digital world, with its war history and modern conflicts, competing economies and adversary/dictator politics cannot be the answer to 'why are we here?'

So my identity process of expression across my two identities is a perceptual movement from separation to oneness, from individuality to connection with all, from ego to the Divine,; a paradoxical sharing of the self (identity) I have become and my true self, my Spiritual identity, is the truth of life.

*Brian O'Hanlon*

*Living in a Grateful World*

- Be grateful to those who have hurt or harmed you  
For they have reinforced your determination
- Be grateful to those who have made you stumble  
For they have strengthened your ability
- Be grateful to those who have abandoned you  
For they have taught you to be independent
- Be grateful to those who have hit you  
For they have reduced your karmic obstacles
- Be grateful to those who have deceived you  
For they have deepened your insight
- Be grateful to those who have denounced you  
For they have increased your wisdom and concentration
- Be grateful to those who have made you

**FIRM & RESOLUTE and Help in your Achievement.**

*l thi vàng ngọc của Tinh Không Pháp sư*

*Submitted by Mary Pease*

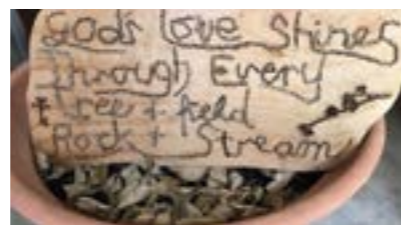
# A Community that Comes Together.

## Celebrating at the Brookfield Spirituality Centre



What a great day we had at Brookfield. The Chapel is a perfect place to celebrate Eucharist and the grounds lovely to walk in and to have our lunch.

The story Matthew Ames told is one we will remember as a message of hope overcoming fear, and fulfilment in a situation which only seemed to herald disaster.



*This sign made of twigs is seen outside one of the doors.*

## Learning Something of Islam

We found it very interesting to visit the Mosque in Mnt Gravatt as the men were coming in for one of their prayer times.

After the prayers the Iman gave us a talk and allowed plenty of time for questions.

While it was interesting to learn how the faith of the Muslim people is different from our own, it was probably even more important to get a sense that, whatever we believe or don't, the critical thing is that we live lives that are kind and compassionate. The Iman told us that this too was a basic tenet of Islam life.



## Being Democratic



Annie facilitated a meeting of the community to take part in a forum on the future. In this form we worked on the update to our future strategy document.

The general feeling appeared to reflect an optimistic sense of a future, given that the challenges we face are not small.

The board and Faith Council will present the document to the community in the near future.

# My Story.

*This is the continuation of the story of our friend who was an asylum seeker from Iran. The first part of his story was in Edition 39 of St Mary's Matters.*

## Leaving Iran

After a while, a smuggler said that all was ready for the move to Australia. They prepaid for the bus and we all went to the seaside. There were 95 asylum seekers. We all went to the harbour at 9pm. The smuggler told everyone to be silent. Groups of five people would go to the boat. I saw a lady from Iraq who was pregnant, with two children and a big bag. She can't carry her bag and the children. My nephew and I help her and her children get on the boat. When I saw this boat I think that this boat is very small for 95 people and I talk with other people about changing to another bigger boat. We were told that we should go on the little boat to meet a big boat at sea. The larger boat didn't come and we had to go to Australia in the small boat.

## On the boat

Night has gone, morning has come. They couldn't sleep in the boat because the boat continued shaking in the ocean. For two days when I looked around all I saw was just water and sky. I didn't see anything else. I'm afraid. My nephew says, 'Uncle, don't worry about this. When we arrive in Australia we will have good opportunities in life'. I cannot eat food, because if I eat food and fruit I feel like vomiting. I feel dizzy. I am not feeling well. I have palpitations and sunstroke. There is no doctor or medicine. After one week half of the people in the boat were sick and depressed.

When I asked when do we get to Christmas Island? They said, we must get to an international ocean line and the Australian navy will come and talk to everyone. After twelve days I saw a plane come, flying around the boat and flashing a light, and then it was gone. All the asylum seekers were very happy. They said they believed the Australian Navy would come soon.



*This is the sort of boat in which asylum seekers find themselves. After a perilous journey they hope to find a safe haven.*

That night the ocean was very rough. The ocean was very dark and full of waves. The asylum seekers were frightened as they had never experienced anything like this in their life. They were afraid the boat would break in the waves and then they would drown in the water. Some Islamic people in the boat said prayers about their situation. Some people could not eat or sleep very well, because all the time the boat was constantly shaking, they were becoming frail and neurotic, suffering from neurosis, and acting on their nerves. After five days I felt sick and could not eat or sleep. My nephew told me you must eat and drink water and after that if you feel like vomiting, don't worry. I am not feeling well. He gives me an analgesic. During the day the problem is the sun; at night it is the storms and flying fish. People sit close together for peace to sleep.

The boat continued on the ocean for another four days until one evening another boat came in close to our boat shining a light and talking. After an hour the ship went away, the Captain saying he could not help but would contact his office and discuss the situation. Five days passed and we felt that the Australian Navy could not find us or help our boat. My vomiting continued. I then saw another boat coming up behind our boat. Men from the navy jumped onto our boat and ordered us not to move. 'Sit down.'

The first Navy man on board said 'What do you do?' I said first let me look at your arm and your sign of who you are. The Navy man said 'I'm Australian Navy'.

I relaxed. The boat was leaking water and we knew we had to leave within an hour. A Navy person brought a pump to remove some of the water as we had to all be identified before leaving the boat. We were given a number. Although I was very sick and could not talk with the naval person, he gave me a number for future reference. I was told to relax and some people would come and help me move to another ship.

I was extremely happy because after two weeks I had survived in the ocean. I was helped to another ship and given food and water. I was told to take a shower and change my clothes. After one hour a doctor and nurse came to visit me as well as a woman from Iraq. She was pregnant.

## Detention Centres

I arrived in Australia in September 2010. Firstly, I stayed at Christmas Island where I remained for five months with my nephew and his wife. After the first two months I had an interview with the Immigration Legal Service.

My nephew had a problem with his wife's behaviour. It was very upsetting for me because they came to Australia for a good future. Although we had problems dealing with this situation, we decided to ask to move to Brisbane in December 2010. When we arrived in Brisbane we lived in the Virginia Palms Hotel for four months (by courtesy of the Government). Virginia Palms was a very good hotel to live in because it was nice and clean, near the park and had a good restaurant.

The immigration officer was very good and friendly with all people. Serco, the company appointed by the government to manage refugees is a big company who helps all refugees who have come to Australia to become established. After four months my nephew's wife spoke with the immigration consultant about wanting to go to another city, because she had found an Iranian friend living in Darwin and wanted to go to Darwin to live with him. Mr Beel who was manager in the camp asked me

to speak to her. Following discussions with her, she still decided to go to Darwin. I was upset with her decision but she was determined to go. When she moved to Darwin, my nephew her husband was very depressed, bored and broken hearted, but we decided to stay together and improve the situation as best we could. We stayed together for four months. One day my nephew said his life was a life of misery and asked if we could go to Sydney and live with other people. I told him that tomorrow we would talk to the immigration boss. I had second thoughts about moving to Sydney but it was what my nephew wanted. The immigration boss said we could go to Sydney, but he wasn't sure if there was an empty room in Sydney.

Eventually, it was decided that we would go to Darwin until there was a room for us in Sydney. We went to Darwin for three weeks. Darwin was very hot. We then went to Sydney Villawood Detention Centre for five months. The Detention Centre was a very large camp for refugees who come to Australia. Some other people in Villawood stayed for long periods, for example, for two and half years. There was no explanation for this. The lawyer that we spoke to in Sydney said that the reason for this was not clear. So if you were not accepted, what could they do? Also long time stays in detention means no freedom.

Life in the detention centre does not provide very much freedom. People in the centre become bored and depressed. That leads to a breakdown in behaviour. Some people decided to talk with the immigration lawyer after their application had been rejected. The lawyer said it is very difficult to present your case a second time. Some people said the lawyer disregarded the case.

All people were in the same situation in Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney and some people decided in defiance to the manager to go up onto the roof of a building. At 5.30am three people went up on to the roof of the building. When the officer saw the people go up on the building, he understood this to be a big problem for the camp, because



*Villawood detention centre on fire.*

four months ago there had been a death in the camp when an Arabic man hanged himself in the bathroom after his application had been rejected. After that, the big boss of the Villawood Camp came and talked to the people on the roof. They said they just wanted to talk with the immigration manager about when they would be processed and released.

After five days the refugees on the roof decided to break down the roof and throw it to the ground.. Many of the officers and refugees left and only some stayed in the camp. This was creating a very bad reputation for the refugees. At night somebody set fire to the building and damaged other buildings. The Firefighting Department and firefighters couldn't extinguish the fire.

The next day I had a problem, because there was a lot of smoke from the fire in the area, I couldn't get enough fresh air, so I got sick. When I collapsed outside, a Police Officer with a dog came to help me and contacted an ambulance. Immediately the ambulance came and picked me up and I was taken to hospital. The next day the Police arrested twenty seven people in Villawood. When I came back to the camp from hospital the next day, the Police asked about my situation and the doctor said I had difficulties breathing and that care must be taken of me at my age of fifty-two years old. Police relocated me to comfortable accommodation. I went to a Family detention Camp nearby. This was very good for me because there was a doctor, food, good room – everything was good.

I was very upset for my nephew because I didn't know where he was

or of his situation. After three days I talked with a Serco Officer. He said not to worry about it as he would find him and bring us back together. That afternoon my nephew came to the family camp and stayed for one week. After one week the government repaired the camp and all refugees were sent. Some people stayed on the roof for three weeks.

When people came back to camp the police guarded with dogs and arrested ten refugees for starting the fire. So the police said 33 refugees were to stay in the jail for questioning. If they did not assist them they would stay in jail and after that would be returned to their country. The camp had a very big problem with water, food, power and little room to sleep.

The police decided to help old people and move them to another comfortable place. My situation was very bad because I had depression. So after two weeks immigration gave me a permanent visa on 8/5/2011.

On 11/5/2011 (Wednesday) at 2.30pm after five and half months I left the Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney. My Case Manager picked me up with another lady from Iran. She worked with immigration to help all refugees after they leave the camp. She and I went to Sydney Airport, where I found another nephew was waiting for me. He was very happy because I got a permanent visa and can now live in Australia. He said this visa is very important. This nephew came to Australia in 1998 and lives in Sydney. He is an Australian citizen.

The Immigration lawyer said my other nephew who is twenty-six can stay in Villawood for the time being but will get a Visa when the police have finished the investigation into the fires and who caused them. I was very upset for my nephew because he didn't get a visa.

So for the second time I came back to Brisbane.

*The final installment of this story will be in our next issue.*

## John O'Donohue: 'For the Senses'.

May the touch of your skin  
Register the beauty  
Of the otherness  
That surrounds you.  
May your listening be attuned  
To the deeper silence  
Where sound is honed  
To bring distance home.

May the fragrance  
Of a breathing meadow  
Refresh your heart  
And remind you, you are  
A child of the earth.

And when you partake  
Of food and drink,  
May your taste quicken  
To the gift and sweetness  
That flows from the earth.

May your inner eye  
See through the surfaces  
And glean the real presence  
Of everything that meets you.

May your soul beautify  
The desire of your eyes  
That you might glimpse  
The infinity that hides  
In the simple sights  
That seem worn  
To your usual eyes.

*'For the Senses' by John O'Donohue, from To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings. © Harmony, 2008.*

*Suggested by Brian O'Hanlon*



*'Inner Eye,' acrylic painting on canvas, by Igor Pertsev*

# Moral Truth.

## How literature can help us find a way

In this post-modern world there is a view that my perceptions about truth are as valid as your perceptions about truth however incompatible they may be. Rowan Williams is suggesting that this is not always the case. Some ideas of truth can lead us into some very dark places.

A few years ago a man got onto a train. He was scruffy, dirty, had lipstick all over his face and a half-empty bottle of whiskey in his pocket. From the smell one might have deduced that he had not seen a bath for sometime. However he sat down next to a priest and started to read his newspaper. After a few minutes he turned to the priest and said 'Father, can you tell me what causes arthritis?' The priest saw this as an opportunity to deliver a small sermon and replied 'My son, arthritis is the result of sin. It is caused by not keeping oneself clean, by drinking too much and by associating with loose women. Arthritis is god's punishment for those who turn their backs on him.' 'I see' said the man and turned back to his newspaper. After a few minutes the priest had a pang of conscience and turned to the man saying 'I hope I did not sound unsympathetic. How long have you had arthritis?' 'No problem Father' replied the scruffy man 'I don't have arthritis. I was just reading in the newspaper that Pope Benedict has.'

This story is probably not true but it is a story that has 'morals' and the morals of this story are about judging people by their appearance, making assumptions about why someone is asking a question and about answering questions in a way that makes you feel good but which does not help the questioner.

Don Cupitt in his book *Above Us Only Sky* defines moral truth as 'clusters of values that shape our life-policies.' It is different from objective truth. Objective truth includes things like scientific truth, testimonial or legal truth and deductive truth. These truths are easily identified by their origins and the

ways in which they can be tested. And, because their origins are identifiable, their shortcoming can, sometimes, be predicted.

Don Cupitt's definition of objective truth is 'the current consensus about what works.' It does not play a large part in religion or morality or in the actual living of our everyday lives. Our very existence depends on the objective truth about the forces which keep the atomic nucleus together but few of us will worry about them in the next few weeks or months.

Moral Truths do shape our day to day activities but their origins are much less clear cut and their 'testability' much less certain when compared with objective truths. Traditionally many of our moral truths come from the church and from books like the Bible and Koran - which many would claim are works of fiction. But we can also find moral truths in our own lives, in the lives of those around us and from books, plays, films etc. As in stories about Little Princes or scruffy men on trains, moral truth can be found in fiction as well as non-fiction.

We can consider some examples of moral truth and compare briefly the teachings of the bible and church with other potential sources of moral truth.

### What behavioural qualities define us as human?

The Bible story of the Good Samaritan is an excellent example. It is a story still relevant after two thousand years and one which is so well entrenched in our culture that it has changed our language. A 'samaritan' is no longer someone from Samaria but someone who is good. Linguistically, bad samaritans have been phased out of existence!

An alternative source of discussion about fundamental human qualities can be found in Raimond Gaita's autobiographical account of his childhood *Romulus, My Father*. The gentle and beautifully written *Never Let Me Go* by Kenzuo Ishiguro ultimately reveals



Morals, or moral truths are found in abundance in 'The Little Prince'.

the grim account of children raised almost as farm animals, their destiny being to die early having provided their vital organs for transplantation. *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham tells a story set in a post-nuclear-holocaust world where those born with the slightest abnormality are cast out of the community to fend for themselves in the forest. In the television series *Star Trek* when the voyagers arrive at a new planet which contains life they first ask themselves if the life is the equivalent of dogs and cows back on earth or is it equivalent to the human travellers and thus entitled to be treated with the respect that we feel should exist between one human and another. Pity that the voyagers who arrived on Australia's shore in 1788 were not all so enlightened.

### Revenge, justice, punishment, forgiveness

This is a much used topic in the Bible and in theology but the account which recently caught my eye concerned a priest who admitted to 1400 cases of sexual abuse of children. He had felt able to continue committing the acts for so long because each time he went to confession he was given absolution by one of 35 different priests! One cannot but feel that there is something amiss in this theology.

This topic is more thoughtfully dealt with by Shakespeare in *The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice*. It appears in several of Graham Green's books

including *Brighton Rock*, *The Man Within* and *The Quiet American*. The author who has made guilt his specialty is Bernhard Schlink who wrote *The Reader*, a novel about an illiterate woman who had a minor and somewhat equivocal role in a world war two concentration camp and who goes on trial after the war. Schlink has written other novels set in more mundane circumstance (*The Weekend* and *Summer Lies*) as well as an academic treatise, *Guilt about the Past*.

### Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a major biblical theme from Abraham to Jesus and beyond. This theme is picked up in many ways by a variety of authors. CS Lewis uses it overtly in the *Narnia Chronicles* and Graham Green, in a more nuanced way, in *The Heart of the Matter*. But the story which tells this moral truth with stark simplicity is Charles Dickens' *A Tale of*



Hi Marg  
Was the second part of Ahmad's story ever published in the St Mary's Matters?  
If you could let me know please?  
Regards

Alan

*Apologies to Alan and those other readers looking for the continuation of Ahmed's story. It continues in this edition.*  
Editor

Hi Marg  
I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the last St Mary's Matters. I read the whole thing in one sitting and enjoyed every bit of it. Also, how lucky am I to have an opportunity for publishing!  
The work you do on it is wonderful. It is so professionally done and makes a wonderful contribution to the SMX Community. It seems to capture and present all the wonderful things that happen at SMX.  
You bless us with your gifts!

Regards Margaret C.

*Two Cities*. Sidney loves Lucy but Lucy loves Charles. Unfortunately Charles is locked up in a French prison awaiting an appointment with the guillotine. Sidney visits Charles in prison, exchanges clothes with him and Charles walks free to be reunited with Lucy. It is Sidney who keeps Charles appointment with the guillotine. The same theme is used in the classic movie *Casablanca*.

Thus moral truth is widely available, perhaps too widely. But humans are sentient beings. We are conscious of ourselves and other similar humans around us. We are aware of our past and of a future in which we will be part but also a future in which we will not be part. Ultimately it is up to each one of us to identify, evaluate and prioritise the moral truths we encounter. Perhaps that is one of the principal qualities and one of the principal responsibilities of being human. In choosing our preferred



The Good Samaritan

moral truths we should remember Rowan Williams' words that some seemingly benign moral truths can lead us into some very dark places.

Terry Pratchett who died a few weeks ago was a prolific source of moral truths in his discworld novels. At the very end of the one titled *The Truth* he says,

'Nothing has to be true forever – just for long enough to tell us the truth.'

Peter Bore April 2015

## Letters to the Editor



The magazine arrived yesterday - thanks so much. Stunning cover page. I enjoyed the articles very much.

Doreen Lovett

Dear Marg, I contact you to tell you that the current issue of St Mary's Matters is possibly one of the best of the lot. SMX is a broad church and you catered for those (I think they are misguided) who reject the Western tradition and embrace the Eastern version of monism. As I love my idea that I have a soul and as my all time hero, Jesus, also embraced the idea, they cannot tear me away from that.  
Mary Pease, David Gunstan (via my favourite nun, Margaret Brand), Paul Tonson, Ingerid Meagher and John Fitzwalter contributed some gems. Thank you for keeping this going and for having such a great mix.  
David Pincus.

St Mary's Matters Namaste: The best yet. I enjoyed it, learned heaps and read it from cover to cover.

Olga Harris

Thank you for sending the Quarterly Magazine. I enjoy reading the reflections and stories from it very much as I do the weekly emails. Being in Melbourne I keep contact with Greg Reynolds and his vision of renewal. It was through your emails I became aware of Greg and his vision for the Church.  
I would dearly love to visit your community in South Brisbane. Thanks to the internet I am able to keep in touch with those who take 'the path less travelled' in their faith journey. The weekly email from St Mary's and your magazine along with 'Catholica' and Eckart Tolle on line give me a sense of connection with the community of faith. I send your magazine on to others who may be interested.  
Thanks to you both for the work you do in helping bring new life through the readership of your magazine.

Warmest wishes

Marg Brauer



# A New Way of Life.

The last paragraph in Matthew's Gospel is about the mission to the world - affirming a new way of life, the beginning of a new existence, assurance of an enduring living presence, 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time'. This new way of life follows suffering and death.

## Poem 1:

We need to die  
In order to live  
To lose love  
In order to love  
To hate  
In order to forgive  
To cry  
To find joy  
To lose sight  
In order to see  
To go deaf  
In order to hear  
To embrace sorrow  
To be forgiven  
To be hurt  
In order to find  
Compassion.

Then our heart  
Awakens  
Living truth  
Unfolds  
Peacefulness  
Descends.

We can love one another.

## Poem 2:

The purpose of suffering  
Is to release our song  
Our breath of life  
Our unique melody  
Composed by our experiences  
Enabling us to listen  
To the music of others  
For the song of the planet  
Arising from our touch  
With the earth

Submit  
Be courageous  
Let our wounds be openings  
Embracing this journey  
This moment  
This feeling  
This sorrow

Turning sorrow into song....



So suffering can be transformative, can herald in a new way of living! To illustrate this point, I want to share some personal stories.

I grew up as the oldest son of seven children to an immigrant family. My mother was an eighteen year old when she arrived with her parents in 1951 as 'ten pound poms', and my father a refugee from Prague, living in Italian refugee camps. My parents met in Roma.

I grew up being fearful and terrified of my father, running in fear of beatings from a leather dog lead when in trouble, hiding, keeping the windows open at night when in bed ready to jump outside fearing dad might come in with his gun and shoot us all!

Dad used to beat my mother. I remember him hitting her in the bedroom and the sounds of her crying and the rising anger and hatred in us kids.

About the age of fifteen I punched my father in the face and fled home, hitchhiking from the Downs to the Gold Coast where my grandparents lived. My brother followed.

I hated my father, resented what he did to mum and us kids. I would be triggered by his criticism when I visited home over decades, talk about him negatively with my siblings, blame him for what went wrong in my own life.

Forty-five years later I had a transformative experience. I attended

a Landmark Forum in Brisbane and it challenged me to have an authentic conversation with my father. I did. I confronted him with what he did to us, how we lived in fear and terror, how we hated him. He had no idea what I was talking about.

It was then that I realised I was carrying the pain, it was I that was suffering all these years, I was still back there, I was stuck! He had no idea what I was talking about!

This realisation suddenly made me forgive him, not that what he did was OK, it wasn't, it was wrong, but forgiving him enabled me to love him and let go of my pain and anger and suffering. It was a powerful, liberating moment that has endured since. I am no longer triggered by his comments. I sit down with him and go through old photo albums identifying ancient relatives. We go through records of old Czech music and sing a few songs. I now love him with an open heart. He is eighty seven this year.

Sorrow has turned into song, a new way of life has followed suffering.

## Poem 3:

Each new wave arrives  
And as it reaches shore  
Merges into the one underneath  
So that each wave  
Is part of the  
One living lake  
One shore  
Immovable  
One water  
Ever in motion  
As are we while alive  
Hastening to our graves  
Losing the life of each moment  
Instead of living it  
Celebrating it  
Counting the blessings  
Merging into peace  
As we reach  
Our own shore.

Each of us can herald in a new way of living. Each of us can transform our suffering into a new way of being.

So what is our mission to the world that we transform our suffering to accomplish? Put another way, how is the universe manifesting itself to us?

## Poem 4:

I wonder what I am in the world for  
As debris floats by  
Storm leftovers  
Crashing waves  
Turbulent waters  
Then quiet  
Silence  
To whence we return.

What am I here for?  
To be still?  
To create?  
To feed the hungry?  
Welcome the stranger?  
House the homeless?

Clothe the naked?  
Comfort sorrow?  
Heal the sick?  
Visit the imprisoned?

What does this world call me to?  
To be present  
To listen and hear  
To act  
To be brave  
To be authentic  
To dance with life  
Feast on each day  
Sing the great song  
Climb each mountain  
Listen to the breeze  
Hear the complaint  
Exhale each breath  
And let the world ring out its call....

See it  
Hear it  
Feel it  
And follow.  
Matthew 25 spells out our mission to the world, what we are here for:  
'I was hungry and you gave me food  
I was thirsty and you have me drink  
I was a stranger and you made me welcome  
Naked and you clothed me  
Sick and you visited me  
In prison and you came to see me'

How we treat each other, the least of my brothers and sisters, is the theme of active love, love that is alive and responsive, that forgives and opens our hearts, that listens and puts others ahead of our own needs!  
**Let us love one another .....**

*Michael Tansky*

# An Identity Shattered.

About three years ago my identity was smashed. My identity had changed progressively over the years. Each time though, the natural flow of life allowed me the time to integrate and accept my changing identity.

For example, the 12 months of preparation to become a married woman instead of a single one, then the nine months afforded me when my identity was to change from a childless woman into a mother.

However, my identity was smashed because one day, out of the blue, my three children rejected me.

Suddenly my routine of working around my children's requirements, shopping and cooking for a family of four and simple things like answering questions about how my children were fairing became a source of overwhelm, confusion and grief.

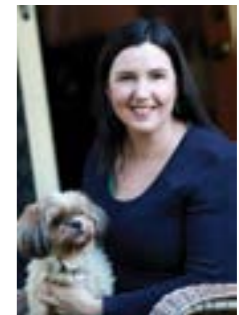
This is probably the same change in identity someone experiences when suddenly and unexpectedly, they lose a job.

When this situation could not be remedied by psychologists or the courts, I had to learn to accept my new identity as a mother who had three children that I loved that were walking around in my community and yet refused to acknowledge me. This is a condition known as parental alienation.

I searched and found support groups and there I was able to begin to accept my new identity as I met other mothers suffering the same fate: our stories, our identities, dented and moulded by the same cruel actions of our ex-partners.

This time that I spent in the wilderness, I discovered the person underneath the mother armour I wore so strongly for 15 years. Through counselling and intense introspection I slowly began to get to know me.

I realized that I had spent my life behaving in ways for the approval and acceptance of others. This became very obvious when I delved into the pain caused by my own parents rejecting me because my children had.



*Karen Neaton shares her experience of being rejected by her children.*

My identity now stands newly polished and awaiting for the world to see. Like a new toy finally opened from its box 45 years after it left the production line and toy store.

Sadly, my true self will probably never be known by my parents as they age with their rules and boundaries firmly rejecting me as I am.

45 years is a good time to accept myself though and bring the gift of myself to a world where parental alienation needs a voice and a role model.

I am doing this by providing education and support through my facebook page 'Rainbow Death'. An identity I never dreamed I would have.

*Karen Neaton*

# All That We Do Not Need and the Little That We Do.

This is a story about simplicity and mostly about a group of Amazonian Indians called the Pirahã. The story is rooted in a book I read recently called *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes* by Daniel Everett. Over about three decades the author lived, on and off and for extensive periods, with his family, with the Pirahã, beside the Amazon River. As a missionary he was there to learn their unique language, translate the Bible and convert them. By the time of writing about his experiences, in 2008, the Pirahã had converted him to atheism and in his conclusion he wrote:

One group of visitors to the psychologists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Brain and Cognitive Science Department, commented that the Pirahãs appeared to be the happiest people they had ever seen. I asked them how they could test such a statement. They replied that one way might be to measure the time that the average Pirahã spends smiling and laughing and then to compare this with the number of minutes members of other societies, such as Americans, spend smiling and laughing. They suggested that the Pirahãs would win hands down. In the more than twenty isolated Amazonian groups I have studied over the past thirty years, only the Pirahãs manifested this unusual happiness. My own impression built up over my entire experience with the Pirahãs, is that my colleague from MIT was correct. The Pirahãs are an unusually happy and contented people. I would go so far as to suggest that the Pirahãs are happier, fitter and better adjusted to their environment than any other Christian or other religious person I have ever known.

Elsewhere he describes them as the peaceful people, as stoic, patient and kind. Aggressive acts happen, but are rare and not condoned. Harmony is maintained by the simple and logical act of ostracising those considered bad for all.

This is not a talk against religion but for simplicity, its ingredients, qualities and

importance. The Pirahãs have one of the simplest material cultures in the world and I want here to spend some time to think about all that they don't have and the little they do, the nature of their exceptional well being and the connections among these.

They live in small communities with relatively small families along the river and they have, unusually, been not over influenced or changed by the traders and missionaries that have tried to do so. They feel no need for change. They have no words or concepts for worry, guilt or sin, Everett says he has never heard a Pirahã say they are worried about anything, no suicide and no signs of the mental illnesses that we increasingly suffer from. They are, despite the possibility of death by childbirth, malaria, panther, anaconda or the numerous other dangers in their jungle life, notably fear free and do not display much fear of, or preoccupation with, death. Corpses are buried quickly, practically and with little or no observable ritual attached to the process. Life is enjoyed and then let go of.

They have no structural hierarchy: chiefs, shamans, witches, warriors or appointed leaders. No one person or group responsible for making and enforcing law. Notably few proscriptions. No religion, no art apart from some simple bodily ornaments, no musical instruments, no great investment in artefacts or architecture, no complex ceremony or ceremonial dress, no creation myths or ancestor worship. No oral tradition. The supernatural manifests for them in spirits who appear to tell them things, sometimes a villager dressed up. They have little interest in the past or the future. When Everett played a recorded, translated excerpt of the Bible to them, they asked if the man reading had lived with Jesus. When Everett admitted that there was a significant time difference between the two men's lives, the listeners replied: well how would he know what Jesus said, how can we believe him?



Their remarkable language, understandably, is fundamentally at odds with ours. Speech principally comprises requests for, or reports of, information and commands. There are no numbers, counting or quantifiers as we recognise them. Everett and his family spent several months trying to teach them to count ... but all parties eventually abandoned the project. They do not have the need for all the words and phrases we need to be polite, flattering, apologetic, meet and farewell, to oil the wheels of social interaction.

Yet, despite the radical bareness of their life, they seem to embody much of what we would call civilised and aspire to as a nobility of spirit. Despite the fact that their average life span is about half ours, they understand how to live with a remarkable degree of happiness, contentment and fearlessness, with dignity and strength. So what do they have and do and can we learn anything from them?

- Their place in nature, their ability to live in, with and off it, which gives them, according to the author, a deeply grounded confidence. They are secure in the knowledge that they can handle anything their environment throws at them, not because they have easy lives, quite the opposite, but because they are good at what they do and deeply understand and love where they are.

- Each other. They are secure in their small communities, centred on the family and very simply structured. Plenty of physical affection and play, babies are always held and fondled. Sexual mores are relaxed and sensible, with the necessary incest taboos. Single

adults can have sex as they wish, sex is openly enjoyed and talked about, monogamy is the accepted norm but infidelity does occur and so do relationship breakups. While these may cause individuals to suffer and be angry with each other, it is not punished by the community, it is not against a law. It is accommodated.

- Pleasure and joy: The author writes: Pirahãs laugh about everything. They laugh at fortune and misfortune, fullness and hunger, catching a fish and not catching one. He talks of their happy, serene countenances and demeanour. Their principal communal form of entertainment is dancing and singing, often for days, with all involved and a little promiscuity on the side. A lot of play and joking together. One day Everett was invited on a hunting trip, the men went off in the canoes to catch an anaconda. No mean feat and with some danger involved. After they had succeeded, the author asked them why they had captured the snake as they didn't eat them. Oh, they replied, the women are frightened of anacondas so we are going to put it where they will come across it, it will be very funny. That was their decided communal men's activity for the day.

- Lazing about doing little: People need to work about fifteen to twenty hours a week to support their families and work is not considered such because it is enjoyed. People have plenty of time to hang out together, chat idly by the fire and cook the odd potato.

- Moderation and activity: The Pirahã value self sufficiency, competency in activity and self control. Excess is criticised and slight under eating is esteemed. They consider it good for well being to be a little hungry and can go without food for a day or two if other things get in the way. They are lean, wiry, fit and alert.

- A life in the concrete present: knowledge is knowledge if its useful and certain, based on your personal experience or on that of someone you

know and trust. Daily life, experienced with awareness and acceptance.

- A shared life: little is owned and is usually impermanent, lots is shared. No storing or stockpiling, no desire for accumulation or change or improvement.

- Simple parenting: there is a strong belief in equality and mutual respect and this extends to everyone, including children who, after being weaned, simply grow into being involved in adult activities, to the level they are able. All have equal access. If there is occasional alcohol or tobacco, age is no taboo from participation.

- Little sleep: the Pirahã do not divide their lives into day and night as we do. They do not need long periods of sleep, preferring to nap from periods of 15 minutes to a few hours, at any time. There is noise in the village at all times and if a man returns with a fish at 3 am, everyone gets up to eat it. These people really do know how to go with the flow.

So, a life lived in the present, with lots of merriment, play and affection, plenty of physical activity, high level of physical fitness and strength, not too many children, unproblematic access to food and sex, few laws, radically egalitarian, secure community and all of this grounded in a deep sense of belonging to, and knowing, their place in nature.

Everett talks of seeing people peacefully asleep on the floor of their huts, with tarantulas and cockroaches crawling all over them.

How different we fellow humans are. There is so much we are fearful of and there is so much we need.

I want to juxtapose this story with an image. Imagine on one side of you all the items, big to very small, that you have bought and or had bought for you in your entire life. Houses, toothbrushes, tissues, tvs, nappies, tins, tubes, jars. The mountain of your material self. On the other side of you

is the mountain of all the non-material things you have consumed in your life: the talk, noise, music, books, tv programmes, arguments, speeches, concepts, jokes, essays, images, ideas, beliefs, stories, morals. All of it flowing into your consciousness, your internal mountain of your non-material self. There really is so very much of us and how much of it has been consumed because we, or others, believed that we needed it, for our survival, our happiness, our well being, our success. The Thai Buddhist monk, Ajan Chah, described the Western mind as being like a hotel with too many guests.

From the book of quotes on simplicity, *Less is More*, is this quote from Lin Yutang: I do not think that any civilisation can be called complete until it has progressed from sophistication to unsophistication, and made a conscious return to simplicity of thinking and living.

We say that our underlying fear is death and so much of what we do results from this. I have thought that perhaps our great fear is of Nature itself and that our material and technological development is in part an endless attempt to avoid/overcome her inescapable laws, of which mortality is one. Why am I so petrified of and repulsed by the rat who comes to shelter from the rain in my kitchen, for example, or the tape worm I discover I am host to while living in Timor. Why am I so averse to being cold, why so irritable if sounds wake me in the night. The more efficiently and impressively we see ourselves protected

*Continued on page 20*



# Thank You, Michael Leunig.

*'I have no use for people who have learned the limits of the possible.'*

*Terry Pratchett*

Getting old has many disadvantages and very few advantages to offset them. But one of those advantages is a wealth of experience which usually translates into the perception, sometime justified sometimes not, of wisdom. Last Christmas, I was at a party attended by a friend of mature years and her twenty-something daughter. They were engaged in a spirited discussion about some course of action and, as usual, mother's caution was given short shrift by daughter. I entered the conversation with the comment that a twenty-year-old brain simply could not conceive the wisdom and experience that underpinned the view of someone three times that age. Daughter, to her credit, was very accepting of this intervention and mother was grateful.

A few weeks ago I went to a talk given by Michael Leunig. The title of the talk, given at the Dialogue Australia Network conference was *Spirituality, Art and Innocence*. During the talk Michael made reference to a concept he termed 'Mature Innocence.' Unfortunately he never quite got round to explaining what he meant by the term. However,

it seems to be an intriguing phrase and mindful of the encounter I have described above, where innocence and maturity seemed to collide. I could not help but give it more thought. Below is what I conclude mature innocence might mean. Perhaps it is compatible with what Michael might have had in mind. Perhaps not, but what I came up with seemed to be a useful contribution to the interplay between the often cynical but sometimes wise perceptions of maturity and the enthusiastic, but sometimes naïve views of youth.

We all end up a product of the mixing of our genes, our childhood environment and our adult experiences of the world. After our mid-teens the first two are mostly static but the third continues to expand. Perhaps we can reach a stage where the first two become so overlain with the last that we can lose almost entirely the vision, the idealism, the ambition and the belief that we can do what has not been done before, characteristics which are so often the hallmark of innocent youth.

Mature innocence is perhaps the ability to exhume, from the mass of life's experiences which have buried it, that youthful innocence and the ideals

which accompany it and allow it, not to dominate our view of the world, but to stand side by side with the sometimes cynical pragmatism which can so easily overpower those who have but a short time remaining.

Next time I offer someone my 'mature wisdom' I will try to remember that 'youthful innocence' is not without its good points.

*Peter Bore*

*'All grown-ups were once children, although few of them remember it.'*

*Antoine De Saint- Exupery*



**MICHAEL LEUNIG**  
*Spirituality, Art & Innocence*

## All That We Do

*Continued from p 19*

from Nature's dictates and beings, the more we see ourselves making the rules and not her, the more addicted, anxious, greedy and crazy we become and the faster we ruin the planet. My rat and tape worm, well I just wanted to marshall the weapons of destruction to get them the hell out of my protected, denatured space, where I felt safe, from Her. Perhaps our underlying knowledge that ultimately we cannot overcome what we are an inextricable part of, is a major source of our insanity.

Not too long ago, a friend and important teacher in my life, sent an email to all those she was important to, in which she said, with love and respect, that she had advanced cancer and had wanted no medical intervention, except, eventually painkillers, assisted by single malt whisky. She requested not to see anybody and to have no funeral and assured us that she had not lost her sense of humour. Her death was like a stone plopping quietly into a pond and sinking to the bottom. She had known

for some time that she was ill, she was in her sixties.

I tell these stories without a moral, judgement or resolution. We do not live in the Amazon and our lives are immeasurably more complex than the Pirahã but I do keep going back to them, snoring contentedly beneath a blanket of tarantulas, laughing a lot and treading so very lightly upon the planet and it does seem we are lot crazier than they are and that does seem important to think about.

*Anne Ooms*

# Into Africa.

Having a daughter working in East Africa has its plusses and minuses. You might think it is mainly minuses, but there are hidden benefits, like great stories.

My daughter Clare has a driver. He has other clients too, so he is somewhere between a chauffeur and a taxi driver, but in any case, she relies on him greatly. He is a very skilful driver, and I asked Clare if he had been a driver ever since he left school. She said no, he used to be a thief. 'A thief!' I said, somewhat aghast. She said he was a thief until he saw the light of Jesus, was born again, and is now as honest as the day is long. I replied that was great, a wonderful story. She replied 'It's not all that great – he keeps trying to convert me to fundamentalist Christianity.'

One of the minuses relates back to when Clare was a teenager, and had an untidy bedroom. Not just your average teenage untidy bedroom, but such a pigsty that we occasionally showed it to close friends and relatives as a sort of tourist attraction. It was a cause of friction. We used to tell her that one day she would have a house of her own, and she would be in such bad habits the she would not be able to look after it properly. She responded that when she grew up, she would have a maid, who would look after such things. That argument carried no weight at the time, but now, as a lawyer in East Africa, she has a housekeeper, who looks after the house, and keeps everything tidy, does the washing etc. So in the end, she won that long running argument. Of course, with her being a lawyer, we have become used to not winning arguments with her.

Fortunately, Clare has not been a lawyer long enough to destroy her ability to write well. For example, an excerpt from a recent email:

Yes I'm working on land issues in Somaliland and Puntland now which is hilarious because I was SO bad at



*Clare and goats in Somaliland*

property law... but this is interesting because it directly involves peoples' rights being violated (... that sounds terrible). NOTHING has been done on land law reform here though, it's crazy! I asked the Minister of Interior today if they have a land registry, he's like, 'yes'. I was like- 'Really? You have a computerised database with records in it of everyone who owns the land?' He was like, 'OHHHHHH. That's what a registry is? No.' He was also wearing thongs and a sideways cap. Oh Puntland.

In Puntland, Clare stays at the UN compound, which is very secure and heavily fortified. When UN people fly out, they are taken to the airport in a convoy. Everyone has to wear a helmet and bulletproof vest, and all the vehicles must have at least D7 rated armour protection. The convoy assembles in the compound, the gates are open, and it is already travelling at full speed as it leaves the gates. The convoy never takes the same route twice in a row.

At the airport, they take off their helmets and bulletproof jackets, and

the convoy roars back to base by a different route, leaving the passengers at the airport. The airport, however, is an unfenced strip of pavement with a demountable shed as a terminal. The shed is only big enough to hold the immigration officials, a toilet and an armed guard or two. The passengers have to wait around outside, in the open with no walls or fences, in the sun, until the plane is ready.

The plus is that it is like a scene out of a comedy movie, an African version of *Flying High*. The minus is: I wish it wasn't my daughter waiting unprotected at the airport.

*Peter Brown*

# Ancestral Identity

Our ancestors are among us in life  
We hold their hands as they walk  
Beside us in silence  
Down the long corridors of time  
We know parts of their stories  
The vignettes of their lives  
Passed down by oral tradition  
And we feel their pain  
And we grieve their losses  
We imagine where they lived  
How they worked and played  
And struggled to survive  
Against all odds in difficult times  
They survived to send their offspring  
Into the future we call the present  
They are part of our identity  
We often recognise their features  
In children born long since their passing  
We see it in a facial expression  
An eyebrow shape or lip formation  
A way of walking or a way of talking  
Or perhaps in body shape or stance  
We have never spoken to them  
But we somehow know them with fond affection  
Because they are always with us  
Our silent ancestors

Anne Maguire

# What People are Reading.

## Warrior. By Libby Connors

Recently as I travelled from Toowoomba to Brisbane, a trip I had undertaken many times, I was struck by how the countryside seemed to be glistening in the aftermath of good autumn rains. The distant blue mountains of the D’Aguilar and Blackall Ranges seemed clearer and closer to me than ever before. And I wondered were they clearer and closer to me now after reading Libby Connors’ new book *Warrior*. These mountain ranges had been the home of the great warrior and lawman Dundalli. Libby’s book takes us into the heart and very essence of what it may have been like for Dundalli growing up in this wonderful country. In reading Libby’s book we come to understand Dundalli’s laws and customs which formed and shaped him and made him the leader that he was to his people. I now look at these ranges as Dundalli may have viewed them with a new-found love and understanding.

For most Australians we know little or nothing of the real history of this country. We know more about native Americans than we do about the First People. Many of us can name Native American chiefs such as Cochise, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Geronimo but how many of us know of powerful aboriginal leaders such as Dundalli, Yilbung, Multuggerah, Dakki Yakka, and Ubie Ubie? What many of us are coming to understand is how inadequate and negligent our education was and in particular our understanding of the history of this land. The First Peoples were basically written out of history. Their struggle to maintain their country, their culture and laws was dismissed and belittled. The 150 year war that was waged in this country is all but forgotten and instead of the word ‘stolen’ we prefer the word ‘colonised’ to describe how British sovereignty was obtained. The concept and lie of Terra Nullus, nobody’s land, infects the very soul of this country, it is found in its



laws and constitution and more sadly the hearts and minds of its people. We are overdue in coming to understand our real history.

Libby Connors’ book *Warrior* is a deeply considered and powerfully told history of the Brisbane area. A must read for anyone who calls Brisbane home. For me, places such as the Post Office in Queens Street, come alive to me of the final and poignant speech Dundalli made to his people with a noose around his neck, for his people not to give up hope and to continue the struggle for justice.

As we reflect on how much effort we made to remember the Anzacs where we were told this is where we defined ourselves as a nation, I wonder if the real struggle for our identity has not been told. And that the telling by Libby of Dundalli’s story is where we will find ourselves as a people. A story where we courageously face the truth of what really happened in this country.

Terry Fitzpatrick

## Testing Traditions and Liberating Theology. by Val Webb

(Morning Star Publishing, Melbourne, 2015)

Testing Traditions and Liberating Theology may well be the best volume to come from Val Webb’s prolific key pad - and that is quite a wrap! Her primary audience is the inquiring lay person. In Val’s own words,

she ‘wrote this book because I meet so many people that either know very little about the development of theology within their church tradition; or else have left their church because what they hear there makes little sense to them, or is even harmful to them. Like Richard Dawkins’ attacks on Christianity, they only know one version and have no idea that theology has actually changed considerably over the centuries and keeps on changing.(p.1)’

The valid assumption underpinning Val Webb’s interpretation is that the true test of religion is how religious faith and practice sustains and nurtures good living ‘here and now’. Much of the book is an historical survey of the development of (Christian) theological ideas. As such, it will be a great eye opener to many, and an enlightening refresher to others. She demonstrates how theology moves from the dogmatic and systematic to the contextual, that is, to liberation and feminist theologies which emancipate theology from ivory tower seminaries and continue to test the traditions of ecclesiastical institutions while providing a theological framework for engaging contemporary moral questions and public policy as well as personal empowerment.

Adopting the style of the teacher rather than the polemicist, Webb does not labour her own preferences, though they are well implied. Her own theological perspective is informed by process theology and relates to a pan-en-theistic understanding of the divine. As such, the traditions informing twentieth century theologian Paul



## What People are Reading.

Tillich rather than those of Karl Barth support her contextual approach. She also endorses the contemporary importance of interfaith dialogue, indigenous spiritualities and eco-theology. Indeed, one of the most significant chapters in *Testing Traditions and Liberating Theologies* is the final one, *Living our theology on the planet*.

Along the way Val speaks to her own denomination, the Uniting Church in Australia (pp.231-235). She questions how theological debates are to be resolved in this twentieth century ecclesiastical creation. 'Can the Uniting Church allow its theology to emerge from reflection on its context or must it stay in conformity with churches from which our ancestors broke away? And...

who decides?' She observes that if this is to be the national Assembly of the church, this requires a theologically literate laity who compose half that body. Adding, many of the Assembly's laity 'simply accept what their theologians say UC people must think, even if they have questions within themselves.'

Her passion is for lay theology (not that she suggests current theological seminaries in Australia overlook this). Because of this passion I found her omission of reference to biologist and process philosopher Charles Birch obvious and unfortunate, for Birch was arguably Australia's most eminent twentieth century lay theologian, and a Uniting Church affiliate. That said, Val

herself qualifies for that title in the new millennium.

Certainly, this is a most commendable and readable text 'backed by serious, inquisitive scholarship', as its dust cover asserts. My copy will be passed on to my critical thinking son-in-law and then it may become a second hand Christmas present to my local pastor! It is also amenable to group study with questions for discussion following each of its twenty chapters.

*Noel Preston*

*The Reviewer, Noel Preston is a retired Uniting Church minister and an ethicist formerly Associate Professor at Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University. (n.preston@griffith.edu.au*

## The Brain's Way of Healing. By Norman Doidge

*Editor's note*

*This book has been recommended by members of the community, and Doidge's earlier book was read by many of us. This is a web review, but is a useful guide for those who may consider reading the book. We are putting a copy into the SMX library.*

In 2007 Norman Doidge wrote the bestseller *The Brain that Changes Itself*. With this book he introduced the topic of neuroplasticity to the general public. Neuroplasticity is the capacity of the brain to keep developing and reorganizing itself. We have that capacity from cradle to grave. In that interesting book Doidge described the work by pioneers in the field of neuroplasticity such as Michael Merzenich, Paul Bach-y-Rita, and Barbara Arrowsmith Young. Now there is the successor of that book called *The brain's way of healing*.

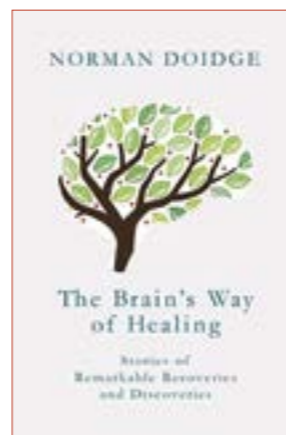
When I had finished Doidge's first book, I admit, I was reluctant to believe some of the specific descriptions in

the book. That is how unbelievable they sometimes seemed (can you really teach a blind man to see with his tongue?) But I have read a lot since then, and I have seen documentaries which were quite convincing and my reluctance is gone. I can imagine that not everybody is enthusiastic about this type of book. I am a strong advocate of scepticism. But scepticism does not mean that new and surprising ideas should not be taken seriously. Instead, it means that you research serious claims with an open and critical mind-set. There are more than enough reasons to take Doidge's books seriously. These reasons are not only based on anecdotal examples but also on research.

Some highlights of the new book I found a chapter about how chronic pain may be unlearned, a chapter about man with Parkinson's disease who found relieve by walking, a chapter about healing effects of laser technology, and a chapter about the healing effect of increasing awareness of micro-

movements. All in all I think this book is worthy successor to *The Brain that Changes Itself*. It is well written and contains a great deal of new and interesting information.

*Coert Visser -Psychologist  
from his blog*



## Women who Influenced their Times.

This is the third of the series written by the Tarragindi Cluster on the subject of women who influenced their times and who continue to be relevant today.

Members chose one from each of three general periods: BCE to 13th century, 14th century to 18th century and 1900s to the present. Our fourth meeting drew our discussions together. The varied and various selection surprised and delighted us.

We explored, discussed and reflected upon the contributions of these women in the advancement and awakening of spiritual and practical forces within their communities. It was never intended to be an exhaustive list and reflects the freedom of choice and democratic/ demographic characteristics of our group.

was 'interviewed' by the Dominican authorities. She toured Italy advocating reform of the clergy and advising that total love of God was the way to repentance and renewal. She dictated many letters seeking peace among the principalities and republics of Italy. In Avignon she successfully urged Pope Gregory 1 to return to Rome. After that pope's death she argued for the legitimacy of Urban VI.

Catherine died at the age of 33 after a severe illness and a stroke. The four hundred letters, her famous *Dialogue of Divine Providence* and the twenty six prayers composed in her final months are a lasting testimony to her great importance in the history of Christian spirituality.

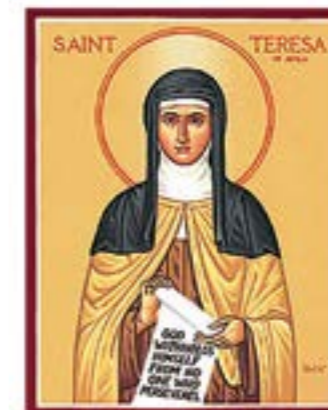
Unlike some other great Christian women she was honoured as a Doctor of the Church in 1970, at the same time as Teresa of Avila.

*Sister Mary Seaton*



### CATHERINE of Siena 1347-1380

One of 25 children of whom twelve survived who came to believe that service was the path to spiritual growth, but that silence and solitude gave one real strength to follow divine inspiration. After a time as a tertiary of the Dominicans where she learned to read and write she returned to public life. She cared for the ill and poor in their homes or hospitals. Then she was drawn into political affairs and



### THERESA of Avilla 1515 -1582

A reformer, teacher, spiritual guide and mystic. As a Spanish Carmelite she recognised the abuses of the Catholic church especially within her own order. She discerned that she was called to reform the Carmelites and instigated a period of changes which resulted in the formation of the Discalced Carmelites. Theresa was punished for her activities by being confined to a convent by the Inquisition.

She educated girls and women in the spiritual practices of community life and assisted John of the Cross and Anthony of Jesus in reforming the Discalced Carmelite Brethren. Among her writings *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle* are templates of mystical theology.

Things she dealt with in 16th century Spain are still with us: the need to return to the essence of seeking God, the importance of women's education, the need to be open to change and the challenge to act on the issues that confront us.



### MADLINE SOPHIE BARAT 1779-1865

After the French Revolution she founded the Society of the Sacred Heart for the education of women from both rich and poor families. She established orphanages and schools for the daughters of the highly unpopular aristocracy which she called the spiritually and poorest people. Her communities of dedicated and educated women expanded throughout Europe and into the new world challenging the widespread influence of Jansenism with her message of the love of God revealed in Christ. She made friends with people from all walks of life. With her understanding of the social, political, economic and religious currents operating in Europe and the wider world and their effect on education she ensured the Society's

valuable and lasting contribution to the education and the promotion of women

Her leadership style as founder and Superior General until her death tended towards moderation and accepting. She tended to rule by consultation rather than decree and allowed her sisters a freedom to seek the possible rather than an impossible ideal.

She led a life of deep prayer and reflection and encouraged her sisters to follow this practice as the basis of their inner lives. Madeline Sophie communicated by letters of which 14,000 of the originals remain. At the time of her death more than three thousand Religious of the Sacred Heart were involved in the education of women in Europe, North Africa, and North and South America.



Mary Sexton

### CAROLINE CHISOLM 1808-1877

She became involved in female welfare firstly in India where her husband Archibald was in the East India Company army. Caroline founded a school in Madras for girls in army families. After they had visited Australia during his R and R she set up homes in Sydney for poor, friendless or neglected immigrant

women irrespective of their background or religious beliefs. Some of these had turned to prostitution to survive. She refused aid from any individual, religious or political organisation. Caroline wrote a pamphlet *Comfort for the Poor* to gain the support of the British parliament for wives and children of former convicts and children left behind by immigrants to Australia. Together the Chisolms established more homes in rural areas, and cared for families and young men. Archibald became the Honorary Colonial Agent and Caroline founded a loan society to assist immigrants.

A number of educational facilities are named after Caroline Chisolm as well as a suburb in Canberra and a federal electoral division. The Anglican church places her in their Calendar of Saints while the Catholic church is thinking about it.

*Continued in our next edition*

## News from the Australian Burundi Children's Fund.

In June the Australia Burundi Children's Fund charity group sent \$9000 to Burundi. You may remember John Bosco Ngendakurio coming just over a year ago to talk about the group's plan to start a centre for homeless children in Burundi. You gave generously at the time.

The group is needing to disband for the time being and so has adjusted its project to fit in with a Catholic organisation, ODAG, which runs a Humanitarian Charity at Gitega in Burundi.

ODAG's main focus is on supporting poor families and children on the streets. We have stipulated that we wish the money to be spent on clothes and food for children on the streets and for families who have taken a child/children off the street, also for

goat farming projects. We chose this organisation because it reports in detail on how the money is spent. An initial report, including photos, will be submitted within 6 months to a year. A further report will be submitted including receipts for money spent, when the money has been spent. We will be able to share this with you.

Although we are not able at this time to pursue the original goal of setting up a



John and family.



John Bosco

centre for homeless children we know that the alternative will contribute hugely to an already well organised charity which supports children who live on the streets and the families who have taken children off the streets.

We thank you so much for your contributions to this effort.

*Merlin McClay*

## Vale - Michael Gerard Fewtrell.

Michael Gerard Fewtrell was born on 5th October 1952 in Brisbane. He is the fourth son of Daniel and Margaret Fewtrell. Number four of eleven children.

Michael's early schooling was at St Joseph's school in Nundah with the rest of primary school and secondary education with the Christian Brothers at St Columban's College Albion.

He began his studies for the priesthood with the St Columban's Mission Society at Turramurra in Sydney in 1970.

In November 1976 he was ordained by Bishop John Gerry to the Priesthood at Corpus Christi Church Nundah. Subsequently he was appointed to Korea. His first assignment was to the language school in Seoul, South Korea.

He became ill in Korea and was sent home to recuperate. He neither returned to missionary work in Korea nor continued with the Priesthood. Many years later a letter was written to Rome and dispensation from his Vows was formalised.

Michael went to live in Ipswich and started his nursing training at Ipswich General Hospital. He became a registered nurse in 1984 and moved to work at Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital. While at Greenslopes he studied for and received his Diploma of Applied Science - Clinical Nursing Studies from QIT.

Later on that year he moved to Perth with his friend Francis who was going to set up a business with our brother Tony and his family. The business venture failed and everyone went their separate ways. As a registered nurse, Michael went on to work in the Cardiac Unit at Sir Charles Gardner Hospital in Perth. At the same time he was studying at Curtin University and by 1991 received his Bachelor of Nursing degree.

He met Brian always referred to as Akarsh, bought a house, and developed a love of gardening with space for ducks, chooks and the cats, Bingo,

Raj and Magic. When Akarsh became ill Michael looked after him at their home and continued to work as the Night Nurse Manager at St John of God Hospital Subiaco.

After Akash's death Michael continued to work at the Hospital. However, he himself became ill. At that time it was the early days of AZT treatment for HIV. There was a lot of fear and uncertainty. Michael had lived with a partner who refused treatment and died. Michael and his new partner Geoff and the two cats Magic and Raj travelled back to Queensland in 1994 to be with our family as he believed he would soon die. They lived with my husband and I on the Sunshine Coast.

Michael immediately commenced treatment for HIV under the care of Dr David Sowden and the Infectious Diseases team at Nambour Hospital. Michael responded well and he and Geoff were eventually able to move to a house in Coolum and later to Buderim. With the expert care of the team at Nambour Hospital, social and community support Michael continued to improve. He then moved to Brisbane.

To maintain his independent lifestyle Michael has received exceptional community nursing care. We are forever grateful to Jo Cleary and then Pat Wall. For many years you have supported Michael with dignity, respect and loving care.

Throughout the years Michael received much support and access to social activities through QPP - Queensland Positive People. This organisation has been a source of friendship, acceptance and help to maintain his independent lifestyle. QPP was his family when he was well.

Michael left the priesthood but he never lost his religious and spiritual beliefs. He was a regular church attendee at St Mary's Catholic Church in South Brisbane. He would take public transport to make sure he was in plenty of time for Mass. As his health



deteriorated my sister and I would sometimes take him. And always there was Pat Wall who would look out for him and help him with transport. With the St Mary's split from the Catholic Church Michael continued to attend services at St Mary's in Exile and has been a much loved member of this Community.

Michael was living at the family home when our mother died suddenly in 2001. We were all distraught, no more so than Michael, for Mum's acceptance of her son was never in doubt. She spread her love equally to all her children.

We have watched over him when he has been gravely ill in both major hospitals and rehab at Mt Olivett Hospital. He recovered and eventually moved into nursing home accommodation at Carindale Nursing Home. He was unsettled there and was blessed to move into residential care in St John's Home for Men at Toowong. We thank both these homes for the care and loving attention shown to Michael.

Last weekend was very special. As a family, we gathered once more around Michael and he was content as we laughed and chattered about our lives and shared a last meal with him. Thank you to St John's Home for Men. Michael was very happy to spend his final years with you.

*Mary Parle*

## The Moment

Reach the point of no return  
Throw off the mantle of concern  
Let the weight drift from your shoulders  
Take away life's heavy boulders  
Release the worry and the fear  
Come to that place where all is clear  
Clear as light shines brightly through  
Your heart is filled with life anew  
Let go and drift to free your mind  
In stillness now leave thoughts behind  
Be free to stand and just be  
Live in the moment - that is the key.

