



Dear friends,

Hope it's not too late for the wish above, and that 2011 has started out well for you.

Here are three check-ins/ updates/ holiday newsletters:

from **Stacey Anne Vickery**

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In 2010 we had a lot of change, Stacey and the children went on their first airplane ride, David and Stacey started Widdershins Crafts in May & Brianna and Cara started school.

Our first airplane trip was fun – Nicholas really enjoyed the airport in Halifax, we saw some fighter jets come in and the volunteers were amazing. The plane ride was exciting, the children took turns sitting in the window seat, it was lots of fun!

Ontario was great we saw many friends and enjoyed short stays with a few people. We went to Great Wolf Lodge with my folks – it was a ton of fun! The girls were wet from the time we went into the park until we came back out, they really enjoyed the slides and playing tag with all the kids. Cara, Brianna and Nicholas loved the little cabin in our room, we still hear about how we could have one in our home... Thanks for such a wonderful experience.

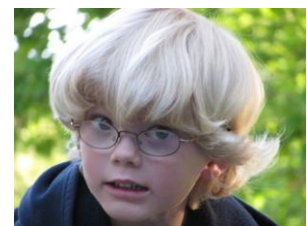
David and Stacey created a soap and art market business, Widdershins Crafts. We started selling at the market in May with a few framed pictures and two batches of soap. By July we had many more prints and in addition to the soap we had lotion bars and bath bombs. In October there was soap, shampoo, lotion bars, body powder, bath bombs and lip balm. We are anticipating continued success in the New Year with our new friends and repeat customers. Yay!



Brianna



Cara



Nicholas

from **Janet Vickers**

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We have our two daughters with us this Christmas. The youngest, Karen, from South Africa, and the oldest from the Okanagan. Time went by so quickly I can barely remember this holiday. Only that it was lovely to have the daughters with us. We miss our son, daughter-in-law, granddaughter and grandson - they are in Mississauga - but we never manage to get the whole family together for Christmas - usually someone is missing, and whoever is far away is skyped.

There was a lot of rain so the girls and I didn't get to do as many trails as we first hoped. And the day they left the sun came out.

We are happy that our kids have made it on their own, independent and enjoying their lives but we do miss them.

regards
Janet

and from me, **Anne Treadwell**

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In the December newsletter, I mentioned my upcoming participation in Amnesty International's annual "Write for Rights" -- here's a brief recap of the event, which was successful and fun:



on **Human Rights Day** December 10th 2010

the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights will be 62 years old. (Canadian John Humphreys was a key author of the Declaration.) We encourage our fellow S.W. Nova Scotians to join us in Amnesty International Action Circle A87's third annual Write-for-Rights event on this significant day.

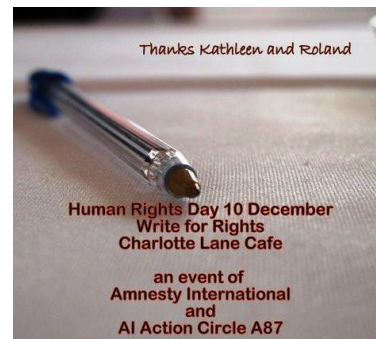
The idea for this world-wide event is simple and powerful. Participants write letters in their homes, workplaces, coffee shops, places of worship and other locations, asking governments to protect the human rights of specific individuals and communities known to be at serious risk of harm.

When letters are written in a group setting, such as the one in this area, writers are invited to make a donation to cover postage if they prefer not to mail their letters personally.

On the last Monday of every month, a group of about 6 people from Pubnico and Shelburne County meet at the Barrington Library to write Urgent Action letters composed from information supplied by Amnesty International Canada.

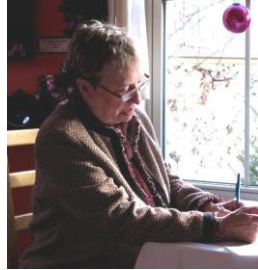
This is rewarding work, as it is one positive thing an individual can do in the face of suffering in the world – and it has been shown to make a difference! On December 10th, we invite everyone to join us for our third annual Write for Rights, at Charlotte Lane Café in Shelburne.

Drop in between 2 and 4 pm.



At least 37 individuals participated in this, our third annual Write-for-Rights. A total of 93 letters were signed for sending, on cases in Mexico and Singapore. Additionally, 35 postcards were signed on 4 different cases, 52 signatures were added to 2 different petitions, and individual messages were written on greeting cards to go to Valentina and Inez in Mexico.

It was a very rewarding afternoon!



John and I were in Hamilton, Ontario, for the holidays; just before we went we had a visit from Lloyd Ryan (first photo), and in the other two photos (taken on Christmas Eve) I'm with Linda Thomson at the First Unitarian Church of Hamilton, and with Kath McIntyre at a party in her home. Nice to have face-to-face contact with three people from this IMAUU network!



I want to keep a resolution I made two years ago. I decided that (no more than once annually) I would draw your attention to the formal **Individual Members Programme** of the Canadian Unitarian Council. This newsletter is, as you know, a very **informal** and **non-official** network of people who want to make connections with other Unitarian/ Universalists who may not have easy access to a UU congregation. **There are no dues and no requirements.** Some of you may want to consider, in addition, becoming a recognized Individual Member of the CUC, making contributions as you would to a congregation and being included among Canada's identified Unitarians*Universalists.

Here's the relevant piece from the CUC website, and I encourage you to consider membership.

“For those who can’t be active in a congregation, because of distance or for other reasons, and yet wish to support and identify with the Canadian Unitarian and Universalist community and partake in its activities, there are options available [such as: Become an Individual Member of the CUC].

As an Individual Member, you will receive the quarterly Canadian Unitarian newsletter CanU, receive information about regional and annual meetings, resolutions, etc., have access to the CUC lending library and CUC email lists (including the “IMaUU” newsletter) and enjoy, if you wish, the right to participate in the CUC through meetings, committees and groups, along with possible voting delegate status (1 delegate for every 10 individual members).

Candidates for Individual Membership fill out an application form and make an individual annual donation directly to the CUC. Just as for members of congregations, it is suggested that the annual donation should be at least equal to the per-member Fair Share annual program contribution (2009 = \$ 91.69). In return, members have the satisfaction of knowing that they are a supporting member of Unitarian Universalism in Canada.

Membership is official when the Board accepts the application, and is maintained by respecting the covenant of membership and making the annual contribution. The membership ‘year’ is the calendar year. Membership is normally for life unless the member fails to pay an annual membership contribution, or resigns in writing, or has membership revoked for cause by the Board.

All donations to CUC from individuals receive a charitable donation tax receipt. Donations of a greater amount than the minimum ‘fair share’ are certainly appropriate and welcome. (For example, some members may give 1% or more of gross family income, as they would to a local congregation.) Such extra donations qualify the member also as a Friend of the CUC, one of a group of several hundred such supporters who make donations directly to the CUC.”

Application for CUC Individual Membership

(Please note: personally, I like being a recognized CUC member, since I can’t be active in a congregation at the moment, but it’s a completely individual decision and **will not affect your participation in this network.**)

Because a few of you have said you like this kind of thing, and no one has “voiced objections”, I’m including below parts of a talk and service I led some years ago in another early January, on the theme of Beginnings. Do let me know what you think – even better, send me your own contributions in similar or contrasting vein!

Till next time,

Warmly, Anne

In the Beginning

How we human beings love beginnings! And words, of course. The Gospel of John tells us: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*" This echoes the much earlier story which goes, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.*" Just a word, spoken into the dark emptiness, and there was light, and soon the world was full of wonderful things. Wouldn't it be lovely if we could begin things like that, if we could create out of nothingness, if we could start from scratch?

My mother, who was always very clothes-conscious, used to say that her idea of heaven was to be in her favourite department store "naked with a cheque book". Actually, I suppose she'd have been rather embarrassed to find herself in that situation, but I think many of us can identify with her fantasy of beginning again, buying an entirely new wardrobe, from underwear to topcoat, and just throwing out the old stuff. As it is, of course, we have to plan our purchases around what we already have, trying to make the old and new go together as best we can. Sometimes, though, we fantasize (as we renew our insurance policies) about the fire that will burn our house completely to the ground, allowing us to begin again with everything new.

According to the Biblical story, God had thoughts of that kind. Not too long after the creation of the world, human beings apparently began to go wrong in a big way, and God decided to wipe everything out with a flood and start again. But, you remember, God saved Noah and his family, and because they were human it wasn't long before everything was just about as bad again. The only way to really start afresh would have been to destroy everything, including the Noah family, decent though they were most of the time, except when they drank too much. It seems that even God couldn't really start from scratch, except that one time, right at the very beginning when there was nothing.

The wish to start again, to make a new beginning, is very strong in us, and we sometimes think that we can do it like God did in the story, with just a word or a decision, like saying "***Let there be light***". We look at the seasons, see that each sequence of four seasons really does constitute a new year, and think that our lives can be equally new each January 1st. We speak of putting the past behind us, as if we can affect, with our decision, the way in which the present becomes the past -- as if we can say, "***Let it be past***" and it is past. But the reality is that the past is never behind us; it is with us, part of us. The only way to make a completely fresh start would be to destroy everything -- our history, our memories, our experience, our selves.

The importance of our history to our very being is true, I think, at all levels -- individual, family, church, and all the other modes in which we lead our lives. Our attempts at new beginnings at any level are doomed to failure if we ignore the past or try to put it behind us rather than learning from it and building on it. Unlike God in the story of creation, making something from nothing, we're always making something from something, working with the raw material which is handed to us, the "givens", which may not be what we would have chosen at all if we'd been given a blank slate.

I suppose the first thing in any project of this kind is the decision to do it, and usually that decision comes from some kind of desire which can be explained. Years ago when I bought an old and neglected, totally unmodernised house, I found it very hard to explain to people why I wanted to do this and renovate, rather than start with a nice modern house which would have been so much more practical. It certainly wasn't necessary to take on such a project -- I suppose it was just a whim, as with those structures they rightly call "*follies*" in English parks. (Much the same kind of reason, perhaps, that God made the world -- it's not as if it was needed, as far as one can figure out.)

The second stage of a project is planning, and this is where, with my old house, I began to envy God. Apparently God didn't have to go through any planning process, it was just a matter of "*Let there be light*" and there was light. But I had to work out what I could afford, and how much I should undertake in the first year, and what should go where, and how much I could do myself and how much I would have to depend on other people. I had to work with the money and space and other resources that are available. The house was a new project for me, but it was constrained by what was there and by the resources I had. It would have been rather nice to say "*Let there be a renovated house*" and there it would be! On the other hand, from my past experience I knew that much of the satisfaction of creation comes from struggling with the "*givens*", the raw materials and constraints, and making something truly new and beautiful from them, like gorgeous patchwork quilts made from old clothes.

One of the supposedly fresh starts with which we're all familiar, through our own experience or friends or relatives or all of these, is separation and divorce. We have, thank God, learned to recognize that the end of a particular relationship is simultaneously a beginning, that the people involved will now begin to relate to each other in a new way and will start their individual lives in some sense afresh. And yet we also see that bonds are not dissolved simply by our saying "*let it be so*", and that the needs we took into a partnership we also take out of it. Any new love or friendship that we enter will need to encompass the baggage of the past -- our children, our furniture, our personalities which have been shaped by our history. We could only start completely afresh by destroying ourselves. T.S. Eliot said in his play, The Family Reunion,

*In an old house there is always listening
and more is heard than is spoken.
And what is spoken remains in the room,
waiting for the future to hear it.
And whatever happens began in the past
and presses hard on the future.*

Eliot expressed wonderfully what I've wanted to suggest: that we always have "*givens*" -- the raw material for a home and the lack of resources to do it the way we'd like; the old clothes in our closet, only some of which can be given to the Salvation Army, others of which we just have to live with; inclinations and habits of the kind that surfaced after the Flood and which surface in all our supposedly new ways of life and relationship; even the old bodies which may have been overindulged over the holidays but are still basically the same except a year older than last January. We can't start completely anew.

And yet "*what is spoken remains in the room, waiting for the future to hear it.*" There is hope for newness, if we can learn to hear our past and inform the future with it. Even though we can't choose a whole new wardrobe, we can buy a few new things -- and it can be fun trying on a new blouse with all your old skirts and pants in turn. We can make renovations without destroying character. We're helped very much, I think, by "*hearing the past*", that is, by reflecting on the past and using our knowledge of the past to inform our choices for the future. We can build anew, not with divine commands but with hard work and determination and some borrowed tools. And just like Noah and his family in the days after the Flood, we can give thanks for another chance at life whenever we celebrate a new year, a new moon, a new day or a new friendship.

The poem/ hymn "*Morning Has Broken*", links the old and the new in a way that only a poet can. Each morning is absolutely unique and fresh, and yet it's just like all mornings. Unless some really shattering experience has happened to us since yesterday, we're much the same people as we were twenty-four hours ago. What is this same old person going to do with this brand new day? The old deep-seated belief in progress makes us hope that we can improve it -- improve each shining hour, as the children's verse says. But in case that sounds too earnest and serious, let me suggest another way of looking at it: we hope to re-create each day, to indulge in a little recreation, re-creation. And we can do it -- with the same spirit that has enabled creative people to make works of art out of pieces of tin retrieved from discarded tin cans. One doesn't need new material, or new people, or new personalities, to make a new life. It can be done with what's at hand.

We're leading slightly new lives, all of us -- Unitarian Universalists are never set in their ways -- but thank God we're mostly the way we were and can recognize each other and enjoy our familiarity, and look forward to hearing what our friends did over the holidays and what we plan for this year. If everything had changed we wouldn't know each other; if nothing had changed, we might not want to.

The late Minister Peter Fleck once wrote about the importance of accepting our personal history, while at the same time refusing to be bound or defined by it. He described his own often painful efforts to make sense of his past by trying to understand all the factors in his upbringing and in his personality and in external events which led to things being the way they were and are, so that he could have just a little bit more control over the way things would be from then on. Fleck says,

It is as if I have spent my life making pieces of a huge puzzle. How amazing -- and how gratifying -- that the pieces fit together and that in the still-unfinished puzzle I can discern the pattern of my life. But in trying to complete the puzzle, I find that certain pieces are missing and others seem to have no place. And it is late in the day. I have no time to create the missing pieces, no time to restructure the puzzle in order to create room for the spare pieces. The whole thing doesn't add up. At least not with the high degree of perfection which, in my book, would mean that all the pieces fit together, leaving no holes and no extras. But God does not seem to share my idea of perfection. And I begin to think that maybe there are meant to be holes and spare pieces to stimulate me to greater creativity. From this point on, any further preoccupation with my past is a waste of time.

The memories of negative experiences that shamed or embarrassed me are there, as they are in the lives of every one of us, unalterably, immutably. There is nothing any one of us can do about them but accept them, live with them, and ultimately cherish them. Yes, cherish them. For lately I have come to believe that these negative experiences may well be what life is all about, that success is not the absence of failure, but the overcoming of failure. Not the absence of weakness, but the overcoming of weakness. Not the absence of mistakes, but the acceptance of the mistakes, which means the forgiving of the mistakes.

For we have the right to make mistakes; we are supposed to make mistakes. Things seem to be structured that way. If we were to be castigated, banished, thrown into outer darkness for having made mistakes, life would add up to a practical joke, and I do not believe it is. We will make our peace with the past when we learn to forgive ourselves for what we have done and left undone, and then learn to live with both.

T.S. Eliot said it too. He wrote, in lines that have become a treasured text for me, "**Success is relative; it is what we can make of the mess we have made of things.**" He and Peter Fleck believe, as I do, that this beginning of January is only a relatively new year for each of us. It contains all the muddle of the past's mistakes as well as the freshness of the future's possibilities. Into this year we bring ourselves, our histories, our personalities, our limitations, to encounter the events and interactions which will make new and beautiful patterns of our lives.

You know those toys for grownups which consist of a sandlike substance enclosed in a transparent tray The sand shifts at the slightest movement of the tray, causing the whole configuration to change into a new picture, a fresh beginning; yet it's always the same sand and each moment's pattern results from complex and mainly uncontrolled interactions. Those toys have given me a new image to associate with the phrase, "*the sands of time*". I invite you now to a time of quiet contemplation of the shifting patterns of our individual and collective lives, of the way in which this new year is both a beginning and a continuation. After a few moments of reflection, I shall suggest some specifics for your meditation

I invite you to think of three things which you bring into this new year, which you can help shape into the year's pattern. Think first of a strength, a healthiness, a talent or ability or blessing which you enjoy, and of a way in which that strength can be built upon and used this year. Write down your thought if it will help you remember it.

Think now of a weakness, a mistake you've made once or often which has affected your present life, a limitation on your abilities, an ongoing sadness or concern, and of a way in which that weakness can be used and transformed this year. Write down your thought if it will help you remember it.

Think now of something neutral, a mere fact of your existence, such as the place you live, your age, your income, the number of people in your family or your workplace

..... and of a way in which that one neutral fact can become a positive factor in this year. Write down your thought if it will help you remember it.

Here are some words for meditation/ prayer:

Spirit of freshness and delight, making amazing new patterns from the ever-changing, still-continuing history of our lives, keep us open to both our past and our potential. Renew in us the childlike spirit which spends no time in recrimination but is ever hopeful for the future. In the beginning of this year, may we be blessed. Amen.

Reading: Forgiving our Limitations

Let us ask forgiveness for our limitations and our excesses:
WE ARE HUMAN AND FALLIBLE.

We acknowledge our limited trust:
WE CLOSE OURSELVES OFF FROM OTHERS.

We acknowledge our limited patience:
WE EXPECT TOO MUCH FROM OTHERS.

We acknowledge our limited wisdom:
WE HAVE MUCH TO LEARN.

We acknowledge our excessive dependence:
WE ARE STRONGER THAN WE REALIZE.

We acknowledge our excessive pride:
WE ARE WEAKER THAN WE PRETEND.

We acknowledge our excessive selfishness:
WE HAVE MUCH TO GIVE.

For all these failings, we ask forgiveness:
FOR ALL THESE FAILINGS, WE FORGIVE EACH OTHER, AND
OURSELVES.

By acknowledging and by forgiving our limitations and our excesses
WE ARE FREE.

AMEN
(So may it be)