



**Greetings to you all, and
Happy Solstice / Christmas / Winter Holidays, Chanukah
and whatever else you celebrate, friends!**

Here are check-ins from some of our members. Kim Rogers (planetgemini@hotmail.com)

preceded her contribution with an encouraging comment on the previous newsletter; she wrote:

Anne I really felt touched by your excerpts from a Solstice Ceremony and the accompanying questions that go with that. Just the kind of thing winter is asking of me right now it seems.... to stop and go within to converse with a deeper voice. thanks so much for making the effort to bring that forward.

Kim continued: **Warm Solstice and Christmas Greetings to All !**

There's just so much I wanted to write this time, about the history behind our festive traditions. It was hard to decide exactly which aspect to focus on for the purpose of this newsletter without writing a novel. But I finally settled on the tradition of the "Yule log" and hope readers will find some interest in this little summary.

The word "Yule" is thought to be of Norse origin, and links up linguistically to our more modern English term: "Wheel". The word is said to refer to the 'wheel' of the year, which begins with Winter Solstice - the point in the year when the daylight is 'reborn'. People all over the northern hemisphere, as far back as we know, have marked this time of year with some sort of a celebration. The increasing strength of the sun each winter has always been a welcome sight to communities, and confirmed that spring, warmth, and another harvest season was on its way.

This festive time eventually became known simply as "Yule", and ran for a period of time (days? weeks?) before and after the actual Solstice day. The main focus of this celebration was to burn the hugest log possible for as long as possible, throughout which time people would cease their work and gather together for music, storytelling, dancing and feasting.

By around the 4th century when Pope Julius 1 decided that the birth of Christ should instead become the focus of this holiday, the traditional Yule log was still burned - but it increasingly came to represent the birth (and light) of the Saviour.

One tradition around the Yule log was to save one cinder to use in the lighting of the next year's log. Saving the Yule log ashes and sprinkling them in certain places was also thought to bring luck to the community or family, and ensure a good harvest.

The tradition of burning a Yule log in home fireplaces continued on for centuries. In England Yule logs were supposed to burn for the 12 days of Christmas - Dec.25-Jan. 5th inclusive (but they would have to have a pretty big log for that, wouldn't they?). This probably applied more to the huge royal hearths in great halls, which could accommodate these monster-sized logs. (Now we know where all the big oak trees went in Britain...! but I digress.)

It's been suggested that as the large hearths and fireplaces started to become less common in people's homes, the tradition needed to take on a different form. That's when the French (those masters of culinary arts) supposedly decided to make Yule logs in the form of cakes that would of course be eaten, instead of ceremoniously burned.

And that folks, is the story behind those decadent and oddly curious chocolate log cake rolls we occasionally see in stores this time of year. As a child I remember having them in the house at Christmas time, and seeing artificial log centrepieces during many a Turkey dinner but having no clue as to why they were there.

It's taken me years to drum up the interest to figure out where the Yule log tradition came from. It's taken a fascinating journey down through the ages. What's most fascinating to me is how long this icon has lasted, and that it still remains (although more often at the periphery) in our modern Christmas celebrations.

So in the spirit of keeping the tradition of the good ol' Yule log going, I have decided that from this year forward since we don't have a fireplace in which to burn a real Yule log, I will instead be adding one of these edible (and meaningful) delights to our dinner table on December 25th.... As we look forward to, and celebrate the glorious return of the Sun.

Happy Solstice, Joyous Yule, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and all other manner of festive wishes to everyone until we meet again in the New Year. .~K~.



Another northerner, Noreen Smith in Fort St. John, B.C. (smithfsj@gmail.com) writes:

Season's Greetings to All!

I am expecting to have a quiet Christmas at home - just the 4 of us. I will have a week off between Christmas and New Years from work. I am hoping to get in some snowshoeing as well as downhill skiing with the family.

I have been thinking since our last newsletter about how some of our group have decided to leave, or are more 'listeners' than writers. I had at times thought of leaving as well. I would think to myself that this (newsletter) wasn't fulfilling what I was spiritually looking for; though I had no idea of what exactly this was. As the months and now years have passed I continued to contribute as I could. I often felt that I had nothing important to say - yet always enjoyed other peoples postings. I know that I was searching for contact with other souls that had a similar spiritual outlook as myself.

Some of our group appear very sure of their beliefs while others such as myself are still questioning where our ideas fit in. What I am now realizing is that by forming these contacts with each other (even though limited in most cases), I am finding that I do feel connected to all of you. I feel less alone than I used to, and more spiritually connected to humanity as a whole. I am comforted knowing that there are others such as myself that are questioning and seeking answers and I like that we are non judgment about each other. I guess what I am saying is that I am starting to feel like I am finding out what 'spirituality' means to me and I feel that my connections with this group have been a great contributor to this.



So even if we are only sharing brief bits of our lives, I would like you all to know that the simple everyday moments you share (no matter how insignificant you might think they are), make me feel a part of your world. I enjoy knowing that others are leading average lives; with happiness and sorrows, doldrums and excitement, illness and good health.

I also enjoy the sermons that are posted as well - they inspire me!

With that I will bid you all a wonderful holiday season, contentment and good health for the New Year. And I have attached a picture of my greenhouse frame with 'natures garland' on it.

Noreen

Janet Vickers, on Gabriola Island, B.C., (janetvickers@shaw.ca) writes:

A couple of days ago I received an envelope from "People for a Healthy Community", a community service on Gabriola Island, giving members of the community a brief report of their achievements in the last year, as well as a plea for donations. Here is what they achieved:

- provided more than 4,000 lunches to hungry Gabriolans
- distributed 3,940 bags of food, 25% of which went to feed children on the island
- provided a holiday feast for nearly 125 people December 25, 2010
- distributed Christmas Bureau vouchers to 98 Gabriola families
- nurtured community gardens that provided fresh, nutritious food for hungry people as well as gardening opportunities for children, seniors, and PHC clients
- expanded storage capabilities of their food bank so that efficient food purchases can be made
- launched a monthly lunch and social event for over 30 seniors in our community
- created a weekly social evening for Youth at Risk
- provided employment and job-skill training for unemployed Gabriolans
- developed a Circle of Care, connecting skilled Gabriolans with people who have multiple needs, while offering support services such as financial training, income tax returns, rent and job-readiness support, haircuts, massage acupuncture, and more.

It struck me how little we know about the daily gifts and strengths within our communities, unless we become engaged in a social group such as community services or a faith congregation. It also struck me how little we know about others until we spend time intentionally listening to them. On page 34 of the latest Canadian Unitarian <<http://www.cuc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/cuc-fall2011-web.pdf>> is an article about Winona Baker who has received international awards for her haiku, which I wrote.

Today I just came back from a crowded craft sale in the village here, and concluded that I could do all my shopping from crafts created by or retailed through Gabriolan's. There is something special about giving presents that you purchase from entrepreneurs whose faces smile back at you as you purchase them.

This season is a blessing when it takes you to the source of so many gifts.

Wishing everyone gifts of community, family, warmth, and hope for the year to come.

(The image at right is of a Shepherd's Pie baked in a casserole dish created by Sunstone Pottery here on Gabriola.)

best

Janet



(note from Anne: those of you who are on Facebook and who're interested in social justice concerns, such as the ones Janet mentions, may wish to explore the Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice page, at <http://www.facebook.com/groups/cusjca/>)

Lloyd Ryan, in Beijing, China (execontrol@gmail.com) wrote to you all (strongly encouraged – you don't need to wait for my reminders each month!) with the following message which I'm including here just for the newsletter archives:

(Please forward to all your contacts and request that your contacts forward to their contacts)

Announcement

R. Lloyd Ryan, DA., PhD. Is writing a book on the experiences of men and women who have been widowed.

Dr. Ryan says, I have already collected dozens and dozens of stories, ranging all the way from the sublime to the horrific. In once instance, for example, a daughter sold her mother's house, within a month of her father's death, so that the daughter could get the money while the unwilling mother could "move in" with the daughter. Moving in meant living in a dingy basement apartment with almost no contact with the family. In another instance, a widowed man of 60 years was denied access to his grandchildren unless he agreed to have nothing to do with any other woman.

Dr. Ryan is inviting stories from the widowed people themselves as well as from their relatives and friends who know their stories. If a brief outline can be provided by email, then Dr. Ryan will attempt to communicate with the respondent by phone and, in some cases, if possible, will meet the people in person.

Dr. Ryan says that everyone responding will receive a free copy of his book, upon publication.

Elisabeth Michnick (bert.michnick@sympatico.ca) writes:

I have had a couple of illnesses recently and have sort of lost track of the news letter. In November, I had a TIA, (small mini-stroke) and this month ended up in hospital for a week with an upper intestinal obstruction. Having fortunately avoided surgery I have been home for another week and am recovering satisfactorily I think.

I manage to carry on as president of resident's council at my retirement home and attend a few activities here. Friends and family have been of great support. All the best to you, the news letter and all the contributors.

Elisabeth

And your editor (treadwell@ns.sympatico.ca) writes:

We had a wonderfully successful Amnesty International Write for Rights event on Human Rights Day, December 10th, at which about 40 people participated in sending letters to Prime Minister Stephen Harper about First Nations children, letters to Mexican President Felipe Calderon about our long-term action case, postcards to the Myanmar Ambassador in Canada about a prisoner of conscience, and personal greeting cards to our groups two “adoptees” in Mexico. (To know more about Amnesty International, go to <http://www.amnesty.ca/>). Here are three photos from the event, including the greeting card displaying pictures of our Action Circle:



*Because we expect this to be our last Christmas living in Nova Scotia (somehow or other, we **are** going to sell this house!) we're staying here for the holidays, with our next Ontario visit probably in midwinter 2012. We'll be savouring the experience of our seventh winter here, and the many good feelings we have about our time living here. We've had only a few flakes of snow here so far this year, but in keeping with the season here are two snaps of past winters, flanking two our first Christmas in Pubnico,.*



And now, all that I need to say at the end of this third IMaUU newsletter year, is how much I enjoy being connected with you, and



(and the New Year too) to everyone!

In faith and love,

Anne