

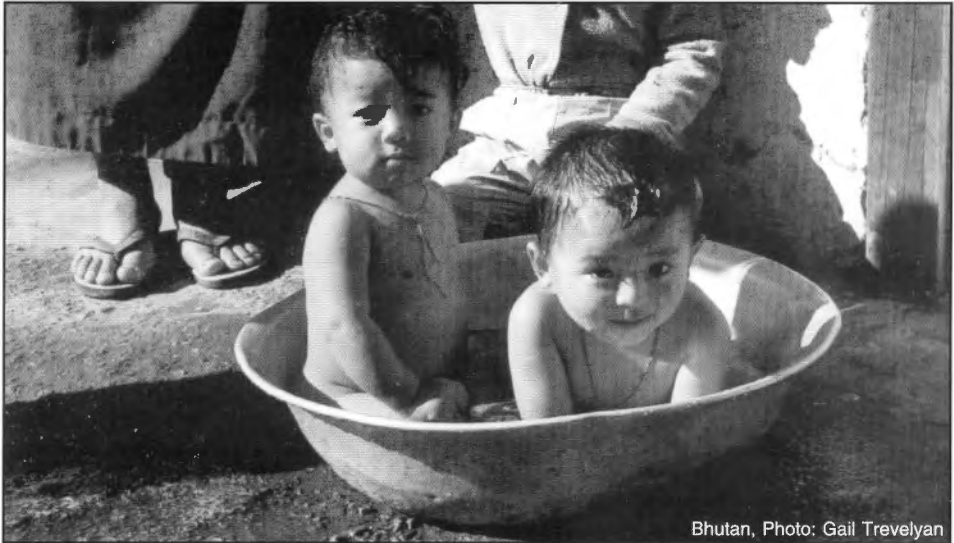
**GLOBAL**

*EXPRESS*

Vol 7, No 2, 2003



**renaissance**



Bhutan, Photo: Gail Trevelyan

## Editorial

A friend gave me a Thank You card recently of the praying hands on the cover. I'd seen it in Oxfam shops—it's one of many beautiful images being sold in aid of the Third World. In isolation it had a deeper impact. I felt I was being given a precious gift... a prayer. 'What a powerful image to leave our readers with', I thought. We tracked down the photo agency and paid for our first photograph. The title 'Praying in the Himalaya Valleys' is a happy coincidence given our photo story on Bhutan, also in the Himalayas.

This issue is full of past editors: Janet Gunning guides us through *the* Renaissance, Christine Kenny invites us to quest for our own, and Libby Boxer and Nicci Long reflect on where life has taken them since Global Express. Goretty Nguyen who promoted GE in high schools is one of eight voices on how to sustain commitment in a commitment-shy world.

Our theme, renaissance, was the idea of one of GE's founders, Erik Parsons. It gelled with us because it represents all that GE stands for eg renewal, rejuvenation, regeneration. Although it's ending, we like to think of the energy behind it being re-born elsewhere. To an extent it is—we (the current editors) are about to help run Action for Life, a 10-month leadership training program in India and South-East Asia, for young adults from around the world. As a learning community of 40 people we hope to discover how our talents intersect with society's deepest needs.

The guiding ethos behind GE has been to encourage young people to believe in themselves and to make a difference. Some have asked what proof there's been of its effectiveness in nine years. 450 subscribers and some encouraging letters doesn't sound much does it? And whoever heard of a quarterly coming out 2.8 times a year?! It may sound like a cop-out but I prefer to trust that God has been able to use it in ways perhaps unknown to us.

As it draws to a close I have different feelings. In some ways it's a relief to end what has often been a painful struggle. In other ways I feel sad because I still believe so passionately in offering young people a life-affirming publication. Above all I feel immense gratitude. It's a privilege to have been called to such a worthwhile task and the people I have had the joy of working with continue to be a real blessing to me. I'm proud of what we've achieved, and as T.S.Eliot said, 'For us there is only the trying, the rest is not our business'.

Laura Trevelyan, UK

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Global Express was started in Melbourne, Australia, in 1994 to link up young people who care about the future. Most of the GE team met through Initiatives of Change (formerly Moral Re-Armament), a worldwide network of people working for personal responsibility and conflict resolution. Absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, together with a search for inspiration from God (or the inner voice), are central to this approach to life. Initiatives of Change is a Non-Government Organisation recognised by the United Nations. For more information: [www.initiativesofchange.org/](http://www.initiativesofchange.org/)

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**Not all opinions expressed are shared by the editors**

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Janet Gunning, NZ/UK

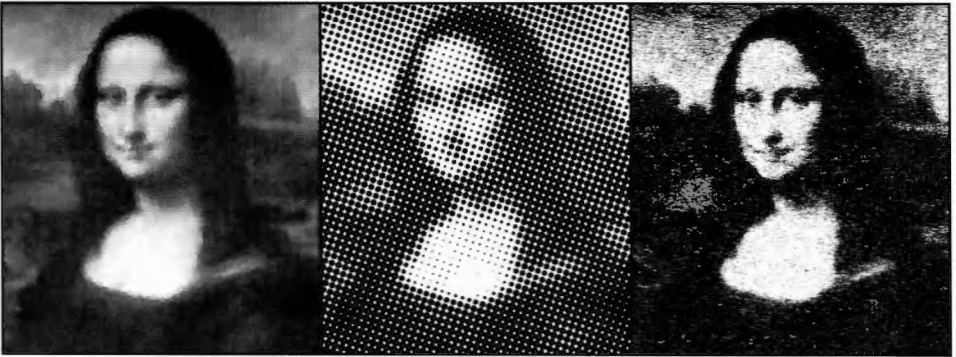
**L**eonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is one of the great icons of European art. It is also one of those paintings that everyone knows is famous, but no one can quite remember why. It is, after all, no more than the portrait of the wife of a well-to-do Florentine citizen from 500 years ago. She was not remarkably beautiful, nor especially important. But Leonardo's portrait of Lisa di Antonio Maria Gherardini, completed in 1503 when she was 24, is not only technically brilliant and innovative (European painting was never the same again), it encapsulates one of those *Zeit Geist* moments when a work of art is both a thing of extraordinary beauty and a window into a particular time and place—what we have come to refer to as the Italian Renaissance.

The word 'renaissance' means rebirth. The rebirth or revival that took place in Italy

from approximately 1350 to 1530 was first and foremost one of ideas. It began as a literary movement and a passion for texts from Greek and Roman antiquity. Through book collecting (the first 'public' libraries were founded in Florence, Rome and Venice during the Renaissance) and the re-discovery and circulation of Classical texts—this relatively small circle of educated Italians worked towards a rebirth of what they regarded as the 'Golden Age' of Classical culture. The Classical learning which was revived by these 'humanist' scholars ('humanist' in the Renaissance sense of those who studied the liberal arts and humanities) covered all areas of intellectual life—astronomy, the sciences, mathematics, philology and literary criticism, philosophy, history, poetry, art, architecture, engineering, and medicine.

For centuries European intellectual life,





and most importantly its libraries and universities, had been dominated by the Catholic Church, which naturally had a clear theological agenda. The humanists had quite different intellectual interests and values, emphasising human, rather than divine creation and achievement, an attitude that is summed up well in an oft-quoted phrase of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Greek philosopher Protagoras that ‘man is the measure of all things’. This emphasis on the value of human individuality and dignity, and new access to ancient Greek and Roman ideas and knowledge, coupled with an economic boom in the Italian city states, all combined to produce an extraordinary flowering of the creative arts, including Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*.

In many ways portraiture is a classic expression of humanist values as a celebration of both the human form and the unique character of a particular individual. And portraits became increasingly popular during the Renaissance. The technical brilliance of the *Mona Lisa* lies in the way Leonardo used his knowledge of mathematics, perspective and anatomy to create a revolutionary new pose. The basic pose he

invented (the upper body partially turned away, the eyes looking directly out of the picture) is still the most common and flattering, one we all use today, from school photos to family portraits.

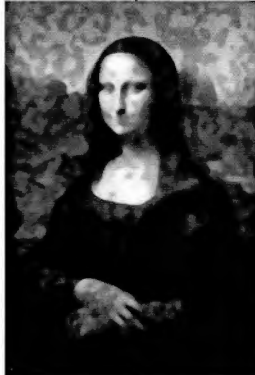
Leonardo embodied the humanist ideal of the ultimate Renaissance man—an engineer, inventor, musician, philosophic and scientific writer, and painter. He was one of the few men whose reputation as an artistic and intellectual genius was almost as great in his own lifetime as it has been ever since. In fact our modern notion of creative genius owes a great deal both to Leonardo, and to humanist promotion of the idea of artistic and cultural progress.

For the Renaissance was not simply a time of intellectual innovation and cultural resurgence—it was self-consciously so. The humanist thinkers of the Italian Renaissance believed that they were living in an age that was quite distinct from previous ones and put forward a new periodisation of European history, which moved away from the Christian distinction between history before and after Christ, and focused instead on the birth, or rebirth, of culture. This reclassification of history carried

It is the very paradoxes of the Renaissance, our perception of it, and its perception of itself, that are so thought provoking now we are living in a post-modern world

with its clear value judgements and was bound up with ideas of freedom and progress. It was Petrarch (1304-1374) who first dismissed the period between classical antiquity and his own age as 'the dark ages'. The Renaissance term *medium aevum* or 'middle period' is with us today—we still refer to the period between the Classical and the Modern as the Middle Ages, as if it is the poor relation sandwiched between the important 'civilized' periods in European history. It was the Renaissance humanists that bequeathed to us the very idea of 'civilized' culture.

For a long time we have held a romantic notion of the Renaissance in our popular consciousness as a great blossoming of the human spirit—due in part to 18th century idealising of it as the time when 'backward' medieval man finally, in the words of Jacob Burckhardt, 'became a spiritual *individual*', and the values of the modern world were born. Historians have since learnt to be wary of taking too literally the humanists' insistence on the specialness of their age, and many have come to question the usefulness of the term 'Renaissance' altogether, preferring to use the terms 'later medieval' or 'early modern' to refer to the period instead. Although there was clearly a sense of excitement and purpose within the circle of humanists, and the cultural revival of the Renaissance had a long term impact on European civilisation as its ideas and innovations rippled out—it was still the minority rather than the majority of the population who had the wealth to fully



participate in this flowering of intellectual life and culture. And for all its concern with Classical republican values of freedom, individuality and progress, humanism was intentionally elitist and preoccupied with 'high culture'.

But for me it is the very paradoxes of the Renaissance, our perception of it, and its perception of itself, that are so thought provoking now we are living in a post-modern world. In our global community is the idea 'civilisation'

meaningful for us today? In a world of increasingly relative values how do we judge our past, and discern what is most valuable in our own civilization and in other civilizations?

Do we still value creative genius and artistic achievement for its own sake as an expression of human dignity? Is the romantic ideal of 'Renaissance' as valid for us today as it was five hundred years ago? In our age of name-brands and trademarks, globalisation and mass media, do we need a renaissance of our own, a rebirth of 'culture' that seeks to express the human spirit? Has our modern emphasis on egalitarianism meant we have under-estimated the value of

perfection; our concern with cost effectiveness meant we have under-estimated the value of 'purposeless' beauty; our sound-bite, disposable culture meant we have under-estimated the importance of education and culture to our sense of community and history? And perhaps most importantly, in our 21st century arrogance do we even believe that we have anything to learn from our predecessors, that we need to revive and rediscover the greatness of our human past?



# Cultivate a Renaissance

Christine Kenny, USA

Something powerful enough to characterise a whole age in world history doesn't just happen. So if you want to experience a renaissance in your own life, don't sit back and leave the job to fate. Cultivate your renaissance like a garden, and enjoy the reward of its fruits and blooms.

Remember your roots. We were all kids once, and our childhood formed who we are today. That childhood is still a part of us, though we may have forgotten most of it. Take some time to regress. Find a playground and swing on a swingset or slide down a slide. Spend an hour or two with a child playing games and

tried T.C. Boyle's favourite drink (Cuban mojito), gave a short card-trick performance to his family, and had an informal telephone conversation with a well-known writer of baseball history.

If you've only scratched the surface of what interests you, dig deeper. Seek out fresh soil. If you can travel, do it. While we can read about other cultures and watch shows about them on television, experiencing other countries is best done in person. I remember once telling friends that throughout my life I hadn't changed much. Circumstances may have changed, but I was pretty much the same old

using your imagination. When I see pillows on the living room floor, my three-year-old nephew sees rocks in an alligator pond. Change your perspective and try to see the rocks—even the alligators.

Feed and water often. Take a class in drawing, singing, kayaking, karate or whatever will challenge you mentally or physically. Always wished you knew how to do it? Next time the snow falls, take a lesson. Use the internet every day? Learn how to create a web page.

One of my friends decided to kick-start his energy by reading about or participating in a new hobby on the first day of each calendar season. That way, he'd enjoy four new topics a year. He chose topics that always seemed interesting but that he knew little about, such as reading music, the short stories of T.C. Boyle, one-deck card tricks and New York baseball in the 1940s. During the last week of each season, he'd treat himself to something related to the hobby. For example, he took piano lessons,

me. Then I left the United States and travelled throughout Europe. I slept in unheated rooms that lacked indoor plumbing. I stood amongst ruins that were thousands of years old. I was pulled off a train by armed guards for not having a visa. I ate snails in Belgium and stroopwaffels in Holland. I became close friends with a Russian. I visited homeless teens in England. Yes, after travelling, I was changed.

Pull the weeds. If you have a relationship that causes you more pain than contentment, fix it or end it. If there's a habit that's harming you—too much drink, too little sleep, negative thoughts, gossip—first acknowledge the problem, then take steps to solve it.

Enjoy the fruits of your labour. Bringing about a renaissance in your life requires challenging yourself in different ways. It's an ongoing process but the rewards will be worth the effort. You'll know, do, and experience more. As the old adage tells us, you reap what you sow.

# sex drugs and alcohol

Darren Hildrow, UK

**F**rom an early age I was unsatisfied. Despite generous and loving parents I always thought there was more to life than what I had been given. At ten my sister and I were stealing alcohol from the drinks cabinet; by 12 I was into solvent abuse; by 14 I was smoking marijuana and taking LSD; and at 15 I had my first really bad drug experience; and for the first and only time contemplated suicide.

This general pattern continued throughout my college and university years. My friends all drank and took drugs and I would try to outdo them to gain their respect. I was 'off my face' so often I thought that without the aid of drugs or alcohol I had no personality. On top of this were the impure relationships to satisfy my need for

faced with the prospect of having to go back to my old ways in England. I had put all my hope into this new opportunity and now, one by one, my plans for the future were disappearing. There seemed little to live for. I went to friends for help but their counsel did nothing.

Then the thought came to pray. I had never turned to God before and knew very little about the Bible or Jesus, but in my heart it felt the right thing to do. Every day I prayed for God's help but for a while nothing changed. One day I felt so desperate I got on my knees and cried out to God to give me strength and lift my spirits. He answered my prayers with a sudden feeling of reassurance and a voice telling me that everything was going to be OK. It was as if

## I went to friends for help but their counsel did nothing

love, strings of one-night stands with disastrous effects. I caused so much pain but blinded myself to it with alcohol.

As time went on feelings of self-hatred started to join the feelings of emptiness. Something had to change, so I decided to leave my problems behind and fly out to Australia. I left nothing behind, however, as all the feelings followed me out there.

After 18 months 'downunder' I was applying for residency, and making plans for a new life far away from the one I hated back in England. I was in a relationship with a girl that seemed perfect and finally it was as if everything was working out for me.

Then out of the blue it all took a turn for the worst. The relationship dissolved and I was

every burden had been lifted. It was the most powerful experience I had ever had. For the first time I could remember I had total clarity. I knew God was with me and felt ready for any obstacle. And for a while I felt I really had overcome the world.

I moved back to England and settled in London. Without any spiritual support I soon neglected God. Old habits crept back in. Again I looked for comfort in drink, drugs and sex, and it wasn't long before the feelings of confusion and my selfish disdain for life were firmly back in place.

Later I moved into shared accommodation. I thought little of the move but in retrospect it was all part of God's perfect plan. There I met a chap who was on a similar



# what else is there?

spiritual journey. He introduced me to an informal group of young adults who met weekly to discuss moral and spiritual issues which my friends considered taboo. These weekly meetings served as a breath of fresh air and a glimmer of something real and different in my life.

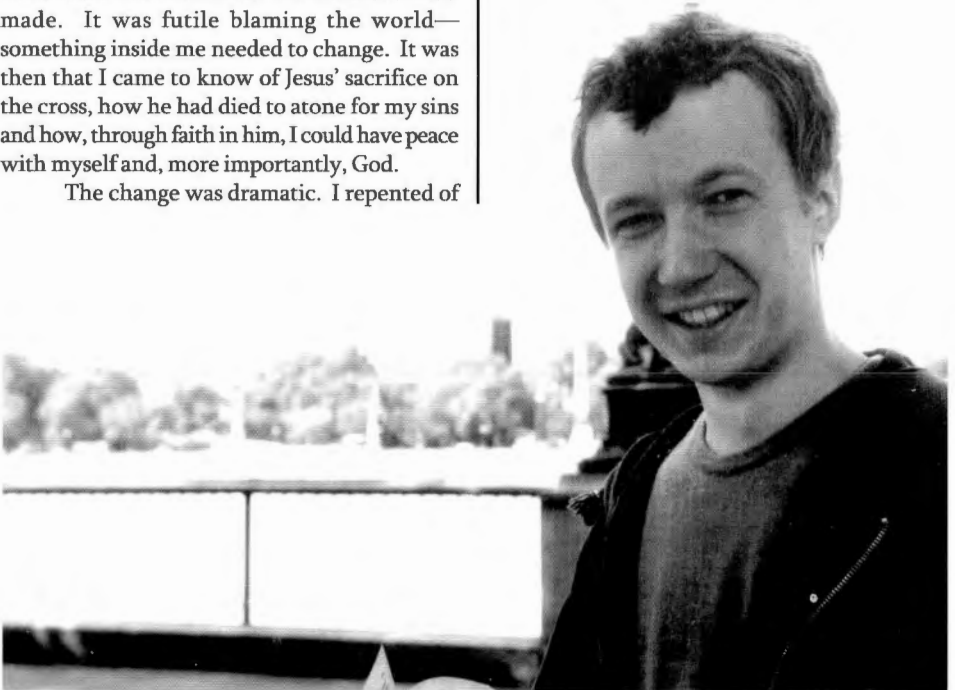
Late in the year 2000 the group thought it would be a good idea to get someone in to do a bible study. Afterwards I spoke with the man who had led the study and told him I wanted to find out more about Christianity. A couple of weeks later, much to my surprise, he asked me if I would like to study the Bible with him, and much to his surprise I enthusiastically accepted.

After studying with Stanley Kiaer for a short time I came to discover that all I had suffered before had been due to the bad decisions I had made. It was futile blaming the world—something inside me needed to change. It was then that I came to know of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, how he had died to atone for my sins and how, through faith in him, I could have peace with myself and, more importantly, God.

The change was dramatic. I repented of

my past and was able to give up alcohol and no longer had any desire to take drugs. In October 2001 I was baptised and gave my life to God. My parents came to the service and took Holy Communion for the first time in 20 years. Broken relationships were restored, and all around me my life felt as if it was being healed in the most extraordinary way.

For a couple of months I was as high as a kite, telling everyone about this new thing I had found. Then I fell to the earth with a thud! While being best man at a wedding the opportunity for alcohol arose. I took it and proceeded to go on a three week drinking binge. Again I used girls for my own gratification. I



skipped my bible studies and nasty feelings that were all too familiar reared their ugly heads again. One evening I was sitting in a bar when an old friend, Sam, walked in. He had witnessed me change but had always mocked me for it so I thought he would be pleased to see me drinking again. When he saw the pint in my hand the look of disappointment on his face nearly knocked me off my chair. He walked straight up to me and said, 'What do you think you're doing?' I was almost too embarrassed to answer him. It didn't look like Sam at all. It was like God looking right at me saying, 'After all I have given you, what are you doing?' I pushed the drink away, and soon returned to bible studies.

Stanley welcomed me back with open arms and the studies went from strength to strength. After some time he encouraged me to 'pass it on' to someone else. I prayed about it

and within three weeks had been introduced to a guy called Simon who was interested in doing a one-on-one bible study. I was petrified before the first study but God really confirmed in me that I had made the right decision. It is one of the most rewarding things to see Simon change and grow.

In the last couple of years my life has changed so much. I now have direction and a purpose. My past is not so unusual; it is merely symptomatic of a generation with no idea of who God really is. There are millions of people in this country dying in their sin, just as I was. I can only give thanks that I have been brought out of darkness into a new light and that my life can be used to give others the same opportunity of change that I've had. It is a tough call to take up the cross and put God first, but day by day I am growing to realise the great blessing of his call.

# July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998, 4am

Eve Wojciechowska, Canada

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998, 4am: to you that date and time may have no significance. Why is it so important to me? It changed my life. It was the moment I experienced a physical rebirth, the moment a neurosurgeon finished stitching me up.

At 18, I had a car accident. About a year later I started getting lower back pain. Over the next nine years, the pain spread to my left then my right leg, until gradually the entire lower half of my body was in pain, my mobility restricted. I ended up walking with two canes unable to study or work full time.

Pain narrows your world: it dictates what you can do, it alters your personality, it saps your energy, it changes the way the world sees you and vice versa. The simplest of tasks become difficult, even impossible. By June '98 the pain was too much; my legs moved only sluggishly when ordered to by my increasingly frantic brain, so my doctor referred me for emergency back surgery. I met my neurosurgeon an hour before

the operation. He gently told me I would be spending the rest of my life in a wheelchair. The best he could guarantee was a reduction in pain and the hope of spending a couple of hours a day walking on crutches. He performed a miracle. Five years on I am 100% pain free with no loss of mobility. Medically speaking I am a miracle.

I was reborn physically but, more importantly, my soul was reborn. I was me again, free to look at the world and have the world look at me without the distorting lens of pain and a physical handicap. I realise my experience is somewhat unique. But that doesn't mean that everyone doesn't go through their own rebirth. Every morning we have the choice to get out of bed and face the world. That choice is a gift, given to us by fate, God, or whatever you believe in. What I have been through lets me see that more clearly than most perhaps; that is the gift of my own personal renaissance.

# Life Lessons

Rebekah Dutton, Australia

**O**ne-night stand. When you think of these words what kind of person do you associate with them? Someone with morals, who is committed to truth and has a faith in God? If you're like I was, then probably not. But as I was to find out first-hand, you should never assume anything...

As a person who does have strong morals, who is committed to finding truth and has a deep faith in God, the fact that I am pregnant as a result of a one-night stand is something both shocking and saddening to me. Call me naïve, even arrogant, but I never imagined I could be in this position. Ever.

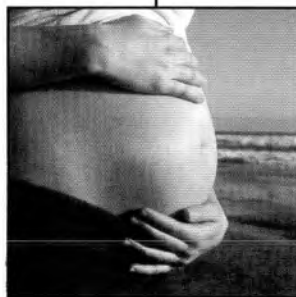
Yet since discovering that I'm pregnant I have learnt a thing or two—about myself, about others, about God and about life. And I believe I'm a better person for it. It's like in the process of this baby's growth I myself am growing; being re-born in a funny kind of way.

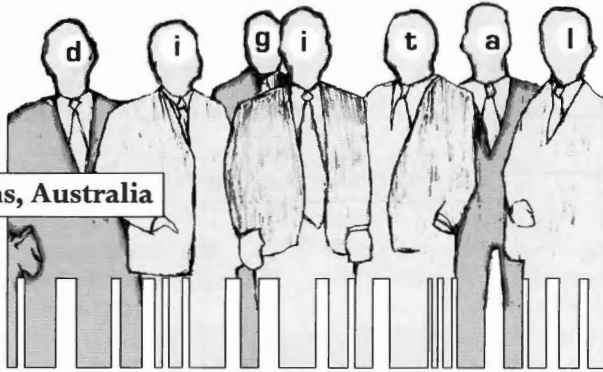
The first lesson I learnt about myself (don't laugh) was that I am human, and that in my humanness, I am weak. I realised that although I may hold high moral principles and believe in a holy and perfect God, I am not God and never will be. I stuff up. I am imperfect. But I also realised that that's OK. Not that I'm excusing my sin, because I'm not, but I am accepting that it is precisely because of my sin that I need God. It's why he is called the 'potter' and I am called the 'clay'.

The second lesson came from others. The people around me, my friends and family, taught me about the love of Christ. They showed me what it means to forgive, to accept, to move on. So many who I thought would judge me, think less of me, write me off—instead opened their arms wide to me. They have loved me with agape love. The kind of love that treats mankind as God treats them. The kind of love that changes you.

From God I continue to learn lessons daily. But the most significant perhaps has not so much been a lesson as a discovery. The discovery that no matter what road I choose and no matter where it leads, God journeys with me. At times I am sure I can hear him sighing: 'You had to choose *this* road, didn't you...', as I envision him scrambling through the bramble bushes of my life. But the point is—he's there. His faithfulness astounds me. And the best part is, it's 'new every morning' and every morning is new.

And finally—life. In six profound months I have learnt that life truly is what you make it. Cliché, maybe—but true nonetheless. I can decide to feel sorry for myself (something I do very well) and fail to learn from all that has happened to me since that fateful day, or I can decide to rejoice in this new life that is growing inside me and choose to grow with it. Reality is I'll probably do a bit of both, but I am sure that when I hold my baby in my arms, I'll be thankful that I had the chance to do either.





Erik Parsons, Australia

## renaissance

I was a grade-school gangster... with an Apple IIc. Yo-yo's, synth-pop, breakdancing and *Star Wars* did it for me. It was the '80s, when TV showed us starving kids in Africa and *Live Aid*, Space Shuttles and a falling wall in Berlin. Then one night in 1990 I was visited by an interesting brainwave: *if, somehow, the minds of everyone alive were hooked up, we'd rapidly find solutions to some of the big questions in science, human relations and spirituality.* By exchanging knowledge we could put together all the pieces of the puzzle, and help dissolve the barriers to global harmony. Little did I know what was over the horizon...

With the dawning of personal computers and the Internet, we humans are finally waking up to our collective global consciousness. An existence-altering birth is occurring, one that will link billions of minds together into a single system...

### Welcome to the digital renaissance, when:

- human cultural evolution approaches warp-speed, through a flowering of diversity, cooperation and competition in the biggest city of all time—cyberspace;
- information technology makes the production and rapid distribution of multimedia communications (i.e. words, music, photo, video) available to millions<sup>1</sup>;
- homogenous mainstream cultures splinter off a plethora of often fluid, overlapping and competing sub-cultures;
- multitudes of individuals become so multi-skilled—and multi-cultural—they become as powerful as an entire company or, like Brian Eno, as creatively potent as Leonardo da Vinci;
- peace rallies coordinated by a handful of activists<sup>2</sup> are attended by millions in cities worldwide;
- geographically dispersed networks and NGOs can brainstorm to solve far-flung practical challenges<sup>3</sup>, and act to reconcile warring systems of thought on the future of globalisation<sup>4</sup>;
- 'World War III is a guerilla information war, with no division between military and civilian participation',<sup>5</sup> where group commanders work in Marketing and PR;
- we all become content reviewers each time we forward favoured emails and visit sites that aggregate visitors' feedback to rate news items for importance and/or popularity<sup>6</sup>;
- 'narrowcasting' makes advertising cheaper as companies use software to personalise services<sup>7</sup>,

whilst others develop entirely new<sup>8</sup> and hybrid<sup>9</sup> business models that bridge fields as diverse as advertising and architecture;

- celebrities, like U2's front-man Bono, pursue politicians on issues such as fair trade, debt relief and AIDS vaccination—and seek campaign ideas from the grassroots<sup>10</sup>;
- multi-media artists (eg DVD, CD, Internet, T-shirts) 1GiantLeap<sup>11</sup>, 'travelled around the world (with a laptop) collaborating with the most happening musicians, authors, scientists and thinkers we could find to explore the unity in the diversity';
- adventurous introverts are empowered—through the safe anonymity of cyberspace—to contribute more to society than ever before;
- visions for the future<sup>12</sup>, business culture<sup>13</sup> and organisational development<sup>14</sup> become infused with a sense of abundance, beauty and mutual benefit; and
- we may discover the path to world peace.

## PERSONAL & GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Technological change can be daunting. But it's important to get it into perspective. According to J.K. Galbraith, technology is simply the 'systematic application of scientific or other organized knowledge to practical tasks.' The point is *technologies are tools we use to achieve specific results.*

The real challenge in any era lies in the realm of humans—particularly in the relationship between personal and collective development. The outcomes of the digital renaissance depend on the inner freedom, diversity and openness of individuals and groups. Optimum personal and group development flows when the individual has enough space to reflect and grow, and the group serves his/her emotional needs, and where teams organise around shared objectives, in which individuals serve the functional needs of the team. Each is dependent for its own success on the success of the other.

Fortunately our new tool, the Internet—when compared to mass media such as TV—is not centrally structured. This makes it more conducive to freedom of information and cultural diversity. The digital renaissance offers us more choices in how we define ourselves, and with which groups we identify. The groups and sub-cultures best able to understand and harmonise these interdependent dynamics will thrive.

## DIGITAL PATHS TO JUSTICE & PEACE

A driving dynamic behind the digital renaissance is the rapid acceleration in the

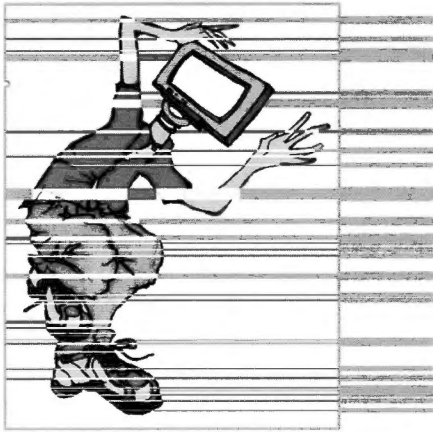
growth of *knowledge-power*. Also in the space of 20 years computers and software have improved form and become much cheaper (hardware halving price, in theory, every 18 months) with the number of users increasing dramatically. This is an exponential form of growth!

However, to date, the main beneficiaries of the digital renaissance have been post-industrial economies—led by the United States. Worldwide these gains have not gone unnoticed with a sharp rise in anti-US sentiments. Three vital steps we must take, using the Internet, to defuse this tension:

- To build new links and partnerships between NGOs, business people, and peace activists in the USA, and the rest of the world;
- To develop—with these links—mutually attractive visions of the future that include a workable path to global democracy;
- To address—with these partnerships—growing global injustices, AIDS, poverty and human rights disasters.

Those of us who use the Internet are like fish who've jumped from a small stream into the ocean. The Internet is that ocean, and it now holds more species of fish than the little stream ever did. Through it we can share, refine and co-create our own visions, strategies and lives globally—with more people, speed and interactivity than ever before. This possibility unlocks a door to a better future for all humanity. Together, let's tap that potential.





<sup>1</sup> See [www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com) for diverse information relating to the social and technical aspects of what I dub the digital renaissance.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org) and [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org) for the latest and greatest in Internet people-power. 'Two superpowers exist in this world: the United States and public opinion streaming out into the streets.' This was the headline of a story in the February 18, 2003 issue of the New York Times. On Friday February 15th, 2003, millions rallied for peace in the first organised planetary event of its type. I attended the Melbourne Rally of 150,000 where I saw representatives of most sub-cultures, political parties and backgrounds. The atmosphere was calm, the energy electric. I walked back to my car with much hope for the future of global peace and democracy...

<sup>3</sup> See [www.thinkcycle.org](http://www.thinkcycle.org) – 'open collaborative design' initiative by MIT. Ahead of its time, a model of co-operation... the open source of problem solving.

<sup>4</sup> *Caux Initiatives for Business* are enabling high-level dialogue between representatives of the World Social Forum and World Economic Forum. See [www.cauxinitiativesforbusiness.org](http://www.cauxinitiativesforbusiness.org)

<sup>5</sup> Marshall McLuhan, quoted in an email on 'Memes' from [www.9-11peace.org](http://www.9-11peace.org)

<sup>6</sup> See [www.slashdot.org](http://www.slashdot.org) and [www.plastic.com](http://www.plastic.com). The sites use a group member-edited content model where approval by individuals raises the gravity of members' news items through visible statistics.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.emode.com](http://www.emode.com) – a site that provides psychological self-testing (E.g. IQ, EQ, personality type) and social comparison, and can access frightening levels of knowledge through analysis. [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) is famous for inter-relating the preferences of book shoppers with similar tastes in order to make appropriate recommendations.

<sup>8</sup> See [www.idealab.com](http://www.idealab.com) 'Idealab! – The Creative Capital Start-Up Factory for Internet Businesses'

<sup>9</sup> Sandell and Sandberg – based in Stockholm, Sweden – blends Advertising and Architecture [www.sandellsandberg.se](http://www.sandellsandberg.se)

<sup>10</sup> DATA is the Non-Government Organisation-cum-lobby group, run by Bono and Bob Geldof. See [www.datadata.org](http://www.datadata.org) 'The big noise' community feature on Oxfam's global Make Trade Fair campaign site is promoted by worldwide celebrities. It's a great way to have your say! See [www.maketrade-fair.org](http://www.maketrade-fair.org)

<sup>11</sup> See [www.1giantleap.tv](http://www.1giantleap.tv) In particular, check out the bulletin board!

<sup>12</sup> See [www.wfs.org](http://www.wfs.org) World Future Society

<sup>13</sup> See [www.cluetrainmanifesto.com](http://www.cluetrainmanifesto.com) for an inside look at alternate corporate culture.

<sup>14</sup> Appreciative Inquiry is a theory and method of Organisational Development. <http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu>

# LETTERS

## to the editor

I think there was an imbalance in your contributions on living together outside marriage (Vol 7 No 1). In the case of Sven and Catherine Lancaster, and Sarah McDonald, they have now committed themselves to their partners for life. But statistics show it is more common that a person who lives with his/her boy/girlfriend does not end up in a committed relationship. The breaking up of a relationship always leaves hurts, and the more intense the relationship, the deeper the hurt. What is the long-term effect of that hurt? The issue would have been more realistic had someone written who had been through that experience.

Nicci Dodanwela and Bhavesh Patel say it is fine for people to live together outside marriage. But have they thought through the consequences for a society which adopts that view of relationships? What about children? Why have societies overwhelmingly across the world, independently of each other, evolved the concept that sex is reserved for a life-long relationship between one man and one woman? Certainly we can point to societies where this does not always apply. Muslims are allowed four wives, for instance. But if you look at Muslim societies, the number of people who have more than one wife is minuscule, and often the reason that a man takes a second wife is to give her protection in a culture where it is very difficult for a woman to live independently of a man.

The sad truth is that the view of Dodanwela and Patel, which is the overwhelming view of Western films and the media generally, is a death sentence to millions in Africa and Asia thanks to AIDS. We have to take the experience of mankind more seriously than they do for our very survival.

**John Bond, Australia**

Faye Heywood's account of her work with the support group 'Parents and Friends of and for Lesbians and Gays' in Australia interested me, but I was disturbed by her assertion

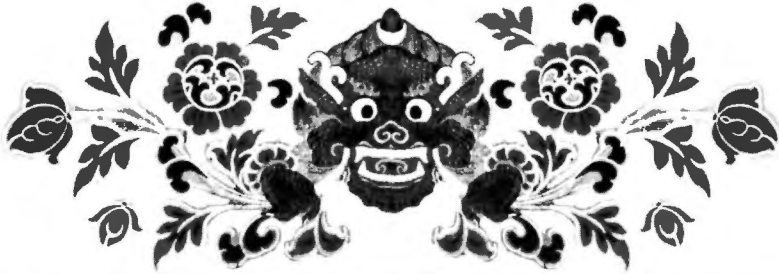
that 'Being gay is not a choice'. This is a half-truth. On orientation the scientific jury is still out: nature and nurture probably both come into it. To deny there is a choice over practice is determinism which contradicts Christian doctrine. Adolescent boys often go through a homosexual phase. They need sensitive help but not to be fixed in a groove and encouraged to believe they'll have to stay in it for life, which is what gay propaganda tends to do.

In Britain there is much propaganda especially on TV. Full acceptance of the claims of the gay rights lobby has been skilfully linked to the principle of equal rights for minority communities. Homophobia means literally 'a morbid fear of the same (i.e. same-sex relationships)'. This word is used to intimidate those who still think that homosexual acts are perverted. Nobody wants to be thought narrow, prejudiced, intolerant, reactionary, or not up to speed with the latest scientific (or pseudo-scientific) ideas.

Sex was God's idea in the first place. It's his gift and he has left some 'Maker's instructions'. Humanists want to leave God out of the equation. Orientation and practice are often fudged. The Christian tradition has no law against love and affection, but it does include a very specific prohibition of certain genital practices. (The three Abrahamic faiths have agreed on this for centuries.) Despite some sophisticated efforts, the Bible cannot be re-interpreted to condone homosexuality (nowhere commended by Jesus), any more than it can be re-written to support solving the problem of adultery by abolishing marriage (and marriage he certainly commended). On three occasions he dealt gently with offenders against the accepted sexual code. He did not tell them 'Carry on as you are'—he expected change. Ostracism and harsh denunciation are out, agreed. But benign condoning can let young people down: they want to know where older people stand, even if they don't agree with them!

**David Hassell, UK**

# BHUTAN



LAND OF THE THUNDER DRAGON



Tiger's Nest Monastery perches high on the mountainside near Paro

Given that Bhutan (Druk Yal) was largely closed to the outside world until 1974 (even now only 8000 tourists a year are permitted to enter this Eastern Himalayan kingdom), it is hardly surprising that most people (I did) will need to consult an atlas to determine its location. I spent ten fabulous days in the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon' on what will undoubtedly be one of the highlights of my Asian travels.

Landlocked between China and India, Bhutan is a refreshing antidote to the mass westernisation of many Asian countries. Largely free from western influences, television was only legalised in '99, and there is not a golden arch to be seen. Flying into the country's only airfield consisting of one short runway in Paro was like going back in time. Two planes arrive and depart once every other day, providing a great deal of

entertainment for the locals as they squat by the side chewing betel nut.

Our trip consisted of a combination of cultural visits and a three-day mountain trek. We visited many 'dzongs' (fortresses and monasteries) and witnessed burgundy-attired monks of all ages as they prayed and worked. The Bhutanese wear mainly national dress (mandatory by law from 1990) and are very respectful of the King. His photo is everywhere and people speak very highly of him. He is a forward thinking but sensible ruler who advocates free education for all (18% of the national budget is spent on education and health care) but refuses to spoil his country by allowing tourists in by the busload. Tourism is therefore strictly controlled by the government hence the relatively high cost (approximately 200US\$ per day per tourist).



Homeward bound—Buddhist monks carrying firewood to Chimi Lhakhang Monastery

The Bhutanese are extremely hospitable. We were fortunate enough to attend a 'blessing the tractor' ceremony at a farm in the isolated Phobjeka Valley. This was a cause for great celebration so the farmers were in riotous song when we arrived. As guests of honour we were ushered into the farm's 'temple', a room with a Buddhist altar and prayer flags suspended from the ceiling. We were served an array of local delicacies; including 'butter tea' and 'arra'—a

potent rice spirit served hot with curdled egg. We were entertained with Bhutanese folk songs and dances until it was too cold to sit any longer, and we headed back to our guest house under a crisp moonlit sky where no street lights detracted from the multitude of shining stars.

Our mountain trek was an unrivalled experience as we trekked through deep snow witnessing scenes unchanged over the centuries—snow-capped mountains and virgin forests, lush



Paro bridge—one of the three remaining wooden bridges in Bhutan



bamboo valleys, pastoral villages, and rhododendron bushes at lower altitudes. One night a snow leopard visited our camp and the pack ponies took off in a stampede. Luckily there were no fatalities...

Despite Bhutan's reputation as a 'mountain Shangri-la,' times are inevitably changing not least due to TV and the Internet. The King's

determination that gross national happiness prevail rather than gross national product may find itself under attack from the new digital developments and the speed at which his people adapt to the outside world. Whatever changes arise, my lasting memory is of the peace, tranquillity and purity of Bhutan, symbolised by fluttering prayer flags in their thousands.



View of the Eastern Himalayas, Top left: Prayer flags, Top right: Drinking 'arra'... grim!





Above: A chorten (memorial) sheltering a prayer wheel  
Below: Bhutanese prayer wheel—a common sight



Young monks in training at Dechen Phodrang Monastery in the capital Thimphu

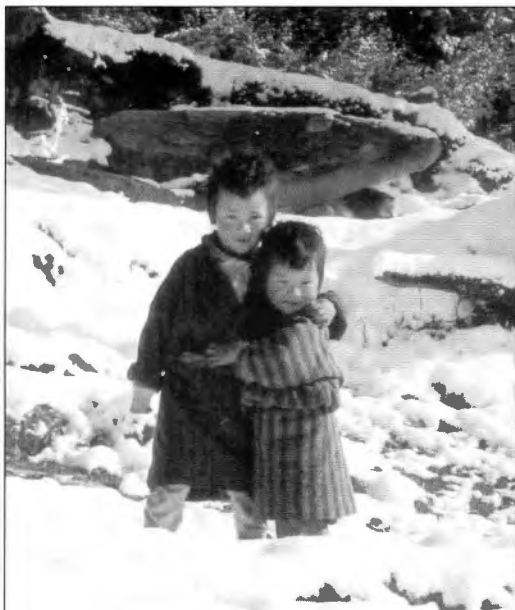




Above: Gogona village—the horseman and his ponies carrying provisions for the mountain trek, Below: Dzong (monastery) near Thimphu

Text: Gail Trevelyan, Photos: Gail Trevelyan + Chloe Wray, UK





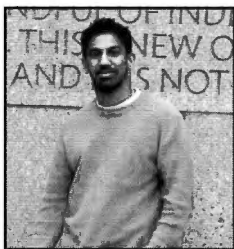
Above: Village children, Top right: Village gentleman, Below: Bhutanese girl wearing traditional dress



The horseman's son, age 13, worked with his father. His family could not afford to send him to school



# MATERIALISM MATERIALISM MATERIALISM and SPIRITUALITY SPIRITUALITY SPIRITUALITY



Mark Perera, UK

**I**t's not always easy to talk about certainties, and not always wise, but one thing we can be sure of, is that the world is steadily becoming a global society of consumers. As globalisation continues to influence ever greater areas of our lives, we are continually re-assured that the market remains the most efficient way to meet society's needs. But while the relationship between consumption and our economic and political lives seems self-evident, how will the market serve our spiritual being? How can materialism contribute to our spiritual growth?

For some, these questions dictate an urgent reassessment behind the motivations that drive our economic behaviour; and while many have chosen to initiate large scale campaigns to highlight the inequalities and failures of the global economic system, others have called for more personal reflection and action. Such is the thinking behind Buy Nothing Day, an annual self-proclaimed festival that began several years ago in the US. Designed to be a day when we re-examine our consumer habits, and try to 'shop less, and live more', the challenge is to try simple living for a day, spending time with family and

friends, rather than spending money on them. Within the wider context of trying to raise awareness about ethical consumerism, and the effects of contemporary levels of consumption upon the environment, Buy Nothing Day asks us to question what modern day materialism represents to our own personal lives. This is made more stark given that Buy Nothing Day is traditionally held on the day after Thanksgiving—that being the first day of the Christmas shopping period in America. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the barrage of ad campaigns and cut-price sales, that beg us to spend more money, buy this year's must-have gifts, and celebrate in extravagant style, without the significance of the religious festival being acknowledged the whole season is meaningless. The universal messages that can be learnt from the Christmas story—messages that can be of benefit to our lives today—are buried under images that try to redefine what Christmas represents, and contextualise it within a notion of high street glamour. Excess—whether with food, drink, gifts, decoration, whatever—is what defines Christmas for many of us (me included). What this implies is that the simplicity of the



## CALM CHRISTMAS

STARTS NOV. 29 BUY NOTHING DAY

WWW.ADBUSTERS.ORG

spiritual subtext is completely lost.

Yet the idea for many of those behind the marketing is of selling happiness: buying their goods will bring us joy, and invigorate our lives. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly common to see adverts co-opting the vocabulary of the spiritual. For example, here are just a few slogans I saw while flicking through a magazine the other day:

- \* A sign of ambition/ a sign of passion.                      Nokia 7210
- \* Believe. Protest, support and act.                      Diesel
- \* Long live dreams.                      American Express
- \* Trust is earned.                      Berghaus

Often there is a vicious circle at work in these adverts: the industry promotes stereotypical images, establishing a notion of what it means to be successful, beautiful, fulfilled. Yet these images merely act to erode the self-worth of those exposed to them, highlighting 'problems' we never knew we had. To address this decline in self-confidence, or self-belief, we become more vulnerable to, and inclined to believe, the messages linking happiness with

consumption: we turn to the products to save us...

According to the Worldwatch Institute, we have used more goods and services since 1950 than in all the rest of human history. We must then be the happiest we've ever been, right? Not exactly... over the same period, the likelihood of a 25-year-old in Britain to be afflicted by depression has grown tenfold. A quarter of the adult population now suffers from a chronic lack of sleep, while psychological problems affect one in five schoolchildren. Mental health insurance claims in the UK have risen by 36% over the past 13 years, while some American studies suggest that between 40% and 60% of the US population suffers from mental illness in any one year. Factors such as these have led to the World Health Organisation predicting that by 2010 depression will become the second most common disease in the developed world. Perhaps most worrying of all is that currently, around six million American children under the age of 12 are taking Prozac or other anti-depressants.

It is hardly surprising then, that at a time of year when the rate of consumption rises



dramatically—namely Christmas—the incidence of depression also seems to rise. One local London authority reports that the amount of rubbish people take to the dump increases by 12% in December and January, while calls to the Samaritans increase by 8% between Christmas and New Year's Day. Of course, the more depressed we are, the more we are likely to spend on anti-depressants and alcohol. And the more we spend, as any

economist would point out, the happier we become—as consumers are rational and work only in their self-interest.

For me, a spiritual journey is a search for happiness, or at least for peace of mind. For many years my search for happiness translated into a search to fit in—to be a part of the group. This meant looking right—having the right kind of clothes, shoes etc, having the right CDs, the right possessions which supposedly defined me

as a person. I didn't really think about, in fact am still learning to think about, what I am really looking for. The lifestyle that I was presumably living—as manifested by my spending patterns—should have brought me all the satisfaction I could wish for. When it didn't, the niggling suspicion was that perhaps I had to look for something deeper to solve my

problems. My desire to view material goods as the solution to my shortcomings was reflective of a desire to receive immediate gratification: getting drunk, buying things—or rather, the right things, from the right places—these were easy ways of dealing with things, without actually confronting a perhaps more painful issue that lay behind my shortcomings. It's just easier to seek instant gratification, the problem is that it

is empty gratification, and ultimately short-lived. Spiritual growth, as expressed through the notion of journey, suggests to me something that takes

time, energy, and heartache. We have to delay gratification, because we don't know where and when it will come, but hope that when it does, it will be lasting. There is no quick fix in the spiritual marketplace. As the Buddhist monk Lama Thubten

Yeshe explains, 'religion is not just some dry intellectual idea but rather your basic philosophy of life: you hear a teaching that makes sense to you, find through experience that it relates positively with your psychological makeup, get a real taste of it through practice, and adopt it as your spiritual path. That's the right way to enter the spiritual path.'

'If, for example, after you encounter Buddhism for the first time you think it contains

wonderful ideas and immediately try to make radical changes to your life, you won't make any progress at all. You have to implement it step by step. To actualise Dharma you have to look at your basic situation, what you are now, and try to change gradually, checking as you go.' In discussing this issue, I continue to consider whether

the societies that we live in today present us with ideas that run counter to this notion of long-term perseverance. Whether materialism, over and above spirituality, can be the only source of true happiness.

*For more information on Buy Nothing Day see [www.adbusters.org](http://www.adbusters.org)*



# 19 reasons to have a Quiet Time

1. A time to enjoy the treasures of silence in which the Inner Voice may sometimes be heard; of listening for connection, correction and direction.
2. Acknowledgement of a higher authority, of God /the Divine Other/ Truth.
3. To nurture the relationship with God at the core of one's being.
4. Self-emptying, detaching, to make space for God and Divine guidance.
5. Important for 3D living; it challenges superficiality by entering a more profound dimension than the one we live in most of the time.
6. A means to discern right and wrong using the absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love as guides.



7. A spiritual discipline.
8. Protection against 'group think', a recall to individual responsibility.
9. Protection against knee jerk reactions.
10. An expression of our need; an awareness of our own inadequacy.
11. Recognition of a Grace Gap that human expertise cannot fill.
12. A motive-checking moment.
13. To receive correction direct, rather than going through other human agencies.
14. For rejuvenation, to find peace of heart.
15. To give your tongue a rest and your ears a treat.
16. To find balance, a different perspective.
17. To discover the next step in God's plan for your life.
18. A safe place to hear what you have not wanted to hear, to see what you have not wanted to see.
19. Where liberation starts...

Text: Action for Life

# GLOBAL

## past editors



**Libby Boxer,**  
**Australia**

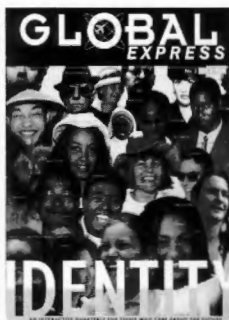
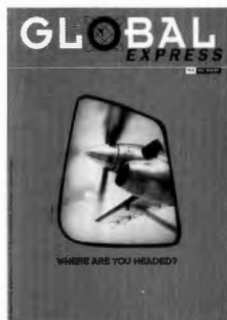
It's a long time since 'that blustery day' on the beach in Oz when a group of young, inspired individuals (if I do say so myself) tossed around ideas to start a new magazine. 'Where are we headed?' we asked, as we considered a new forum for young people around the globe.

We mastered the art of sending faxes in order to share ideas with friends and gather articles. Selecting a name for the 'interactive quarterly' was fun and we were very excited when we decided to include an interactive section called *Fax-think-link*.

In June 1994 I was in Melbourne with the GE team. We worked over many late nights getting the pages ready for the exciting birth! As the sun came up on my 21st birthday another milestone was reached. We had our first issue ready to go to the printers. So excited, I literally cut and pasted (yes, with scissors and glue) a mock copy to show everyone.

Later in July, I was in Switzerland promoting this new baby at Caux, the international centre for Initiatives of Change. Conscientiously we sold copies several times a day and gradually built up a subscriber database. On my return, I took on the task of managing subscriptions from Adelaide. I felt so clever when (by fax and email) we worked out how to send files without having to post a floppy disk to Melbourne. Would you believe it took about 35 minutes to work through the complex process of sending a binary file? What a revelation. With my team of volunteers, we addressed, bagged and organised postage for the global distribution to our subscribers.

Well GE has certainly changed since its inception. As I turn 30, I realise I have too! I am now learning about the world with and through the primary school children I teach. I am thrilled GE continued for nine years and congratulate the worldwide team for such an achievement. I know that all of us touched by writing for or reading it will continue to share our passion in our various walks of life. All good things must come to an end but as one chapter ends a new one begins.



# EXPRESS

**L**ots has happened, for me, since I worked on GE (1996 – 2001), much of it as a direct or indirect consequence of that work. In some ways, I'm experiencing many little 're-births', as I discover how human I am and how exciting that can be. In other ways, I sense life slipping away as I get caught up in the routine of daily survival, and wish I had the courage to really examine my priorities and change my lifestyle accordingly.

This world is a confusing place. I had thought that, as I got older, the confusion would diminish, and my understanding would increase. But no! Instead of narrowing into a controllable, understandable, manageable space my world has broadened out into a chaotic infinity of questions, choices, decisions and possibilities. Juggling work (and the corporate world is a huge test for me—if you don't look after yourself, no one else will; and your job is to make money—is this what life is?), study, social life, and my husband, is teaching me about time in a new way. (My husband, Roshan, is not just one of the balls; he is the reason I'm able to keep throwing and catching, and is why I am where I am now!) When I was a child, time was not a precious commodity; there was time enough for all I wanted to do. Now, there is never enough time, and I have begun to think more about my priorities.

This is difficult. When you're still working out who you are and what your contribution to this world might be, how do you settle on priorities? Roshan who, unlike me, comes from a non-Western society, has grown up with different priorities and continues to challenge me. As does the idea of 'spirituality'.

I'm still not sure of the meaning of this word, except that—for me—it has something to do with being connected to your inner being and also to your exterior environment, and knowing how those two 'places' fit together. I am struggling with the relationships between religion and spirituality, but know that I need religion to give form to my spirituality, and that I need spirituality to get my priorities right and

## **Nicci Dodanwela, Australia**



to be able to make the most of this life. I don't think I can say that my faith has grown over the last few years; my spirit has, but is striving to find a form of expression.

My friends have become increasingly important to me, as a source of reassurance and happiness. Where I used to be happy to scratch the surface with friends—to barely get beyond going to the cinema and having a laugh together—I now need more, and so do they. The friends I made while working on GE showed me what friends can be, and I miss them immensely.

What else? Do I still believe in the GE ethos that an individual can make a difference? Yes, probably more than I ever did. Each day, I awake more aware of—and stimulated by—my responsibility for this world. And that means I also feel more frustrated by the sense of powerlessness that sometimes—no, often—overwhelms me. The lead-up to the war in Iraq, and the subsequent invasion, has been a constant source of this sense.

I am less idealistic in that I cannot see one 'right' path ahead. All I can do is to feel my way as best I can, with the knowledge that my family and friends are beside me, and that I am beside them. (Oh dear, another thing that happens as you get older is that clichés become less avoidable!) I look forward to keeping in touch with the large GE network—it has been a wonderful source of friendships and communications. Here's to a big re-birth, in whatever form it takes.

*Nicci Dodanwela is Editorial Assistant for Penguin Books, Melbourne, Australia*

# A Vision for the Land



## Ian Heywood, Australia

**T**o walk through life in my own strength tends to failure. I have tried it often and probably will again. The alternative is 'to walk humbly with our God' (Micah 6:8). Walking humbly with God requires me to recognise his sovereignty over my life, to lay my concerns at his feet, and to listen for answers. It is a sincere movement of the heart towards God, and should be expressed through honest, self-effacing relationships with him and others.



Three significant challenges that have surfaced in my life have been the need to change vocations in 1970, my health during the early 1980s, and the necessity to alter our farming methods during the 1990s. Each time I tried my own solutions, each time I was disappointed with the results, and each time I eventually began to walk more humbly with my God. The result in each instance has been unequivocal and clear.

Not many Australian farmers would seek spiritual guidance in relation to their farming methods. I like most tended to be self-sufficient, but over many years I became less satisfied with the way we were doing things. As I endeavoured to put God more at the centre of relationships, it became evident that other methods were available. Education had equipped me with an avalanche of technical information, but the real 'breakthroughs' occurred in two separate incidents.

Firstly, we needed to write a vision. How could I measure progress if I didn't know where I was going? After many nights of prayerful consideration my wife, Faye, and I arrived at the following conclusion. Our vision was to be content. This we agreed could only be achieved through relationships. Relationships with

- God
- each other
- family
- neighbours
- the land.





For me, the latter is of equal importance to the others. I see myself as one organism relating to others in the wider ecosystem. If the land is stressed or in pain then I should be also. Equally when it is fruitful I should rejoice. Humble relationship with God brings us spiritual and emotional blessings. If we are in relationship with the land—not control—it will bring similar rewards.

Secondly, we needed to develop a landscape vision. The drought of 2002/2003 (a one in a hundred year event) was a blessing for us because it forced us to attempt a rewrite of our drought policy. But what was the value of a drought policy or any other policy if we were not clear how our land was 'to be' at any moment in time. Healthy land for us has 100% ground cover, greater than 1000 kg/ha vegetation above the ground, maximum diversity of species, and groups of trees no more than 400 metres apart etc. If the land is healthy it is able to maximise use of sunlight and rain (both free). When our relationship with the land is as it should be, this

vision will become reality.

When the decision to put God at the centre, and to walk humbly with him happens, beneficial change occurs. In the last three decades God has blessed our decision-making. He continues to do so as we share the work with our son Gavin and his wife Steph, and welcome grandchildren. God has truly blessed our search for relationship.



# Commitment

...are you running from it?

**O**ur final What-U-Think section is devoted to commitment. We asked a variety of people (famous and not-so famous) to reflect on two questions: What sustains your commitment to truth?

How do you sustain your commitment to your particular area of work/calling?

**The Rt. Hon Ann Widdecombe is a Conservative Member of Parliament for Maidstone and Weald, England. She was appointed Shadow Secretary of State for Health in June 1998. From June 1999 to September 2001 she was Shadow Home Secretary.**



**I**f you believe something is right then you have a choice: you can try to make it happen or you can leave it to others. Wilberforce believed it was right to abolish slavery so he took on a society that, on the whole, either thought he was wrong or was

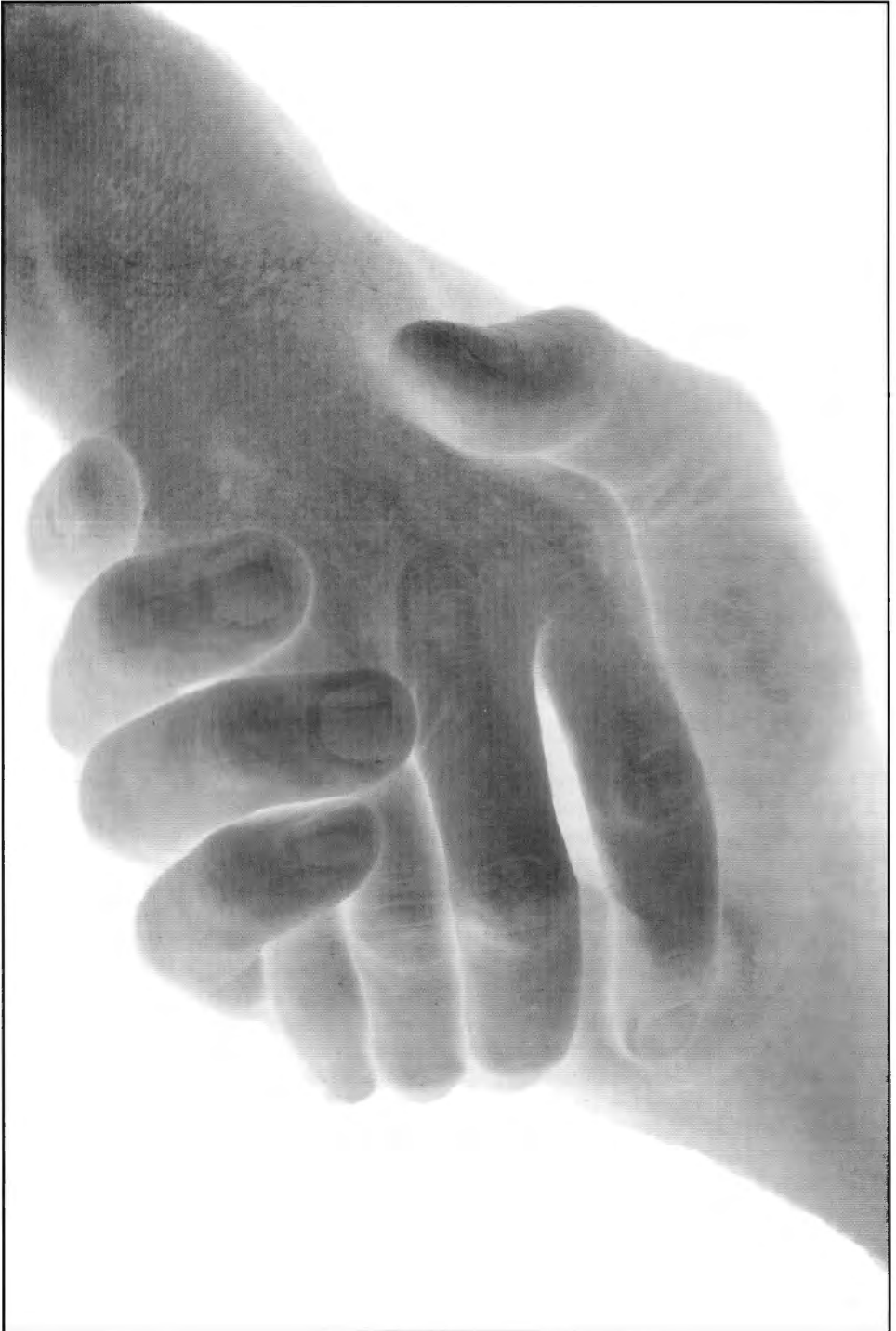
indifferent to the whole issue. It was decades not years before that vision became reality but he never gave up. Florence Nightingale, Albert Schweitzer, Elizabeth Fry and Thomas More were also people who did not give up. The going was tough and the world was sceptical but the cause was great enough to pursue.

Today we live in a society where compromise and doubt have replaced resolution and commitment, where determination is written off as obsession, and where self-sacrifice is regarded not as noble but as mad. I have never accepted that view of life and when I believe

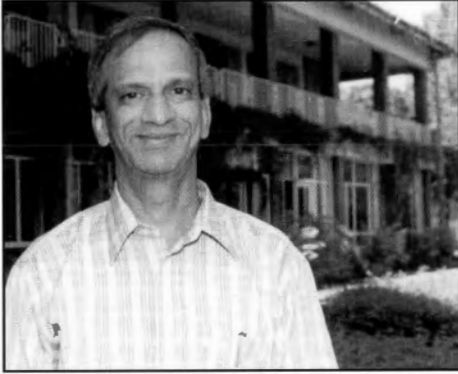
genuinely in a cause as I do in the pro-life fight, for example, then I am not prepared to be half-hearted. Once, ten years ago, a constituent of mine was incarcerated unjustly in Morocco and getting him released was probably my biggest success with an individual case but it wasn't done overnight. It took well over a year of solid battering including a visit to Rabat. What would that chap's fate have been if I had said, 'Oh, well. It's wrong but what can I do?'

One of my favourite hymns is, 'Father hear the prayer we offer, not for ease that prayer shall be, but for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously.' It is a hymn that extols endurance—the will to keep going. Very few people who have decided to make a difference have not been told that they would fail, that there is more to life, and that they had done all they could and should move on. In other words, they have been urged to abandon the fight for what they knew was right and usually by friends and loved ones.

Beethoven was stone deaf and produced wonderful music, Milton was blind and wrote descriptive verse, Stephen Hawking is confined to a wheelchair but bestrides the world with academic brilliance, Luther was a single monk against all Christendom, Helen Keller was born blind, deaf and dumb. If they could overcome obstacles of that order of magnitude what is there to stop the rest of us from doing what we know we should do?



**Bhanu Kale is the Editor of a monthly magazine called Antarnaad dedicated to literature and social issues. He is currently Managing Trustee of the trust which looks after the work of Initiatives of Change in India.**



while retaining freedom on both sides to let one's hair down. Because my wife, Varsha, and I are committed to each other for life, we know that even if we differ strongly on certain points it will not in anyway endanger our marriage. Commitment secures the relationship and gives us the freedom to differ! It is, in fact, the foundation of our life together.

I was fortunate at a young age to come to a place called Asia Plateau, in the hills of Western India, which is a centre of Initiatives of Change (earlier known as Moral Re-Armament). There I learnt the significance of commitment and soon found myself adopting its central message which can be summed up in six words: Better world starts with better me. That was over three decades ago and today I share that commitment with the same passion. It has enabled me to light a small candle in many situations rather than just cursing the darkness. These days, when we Indians often

## **COMMITMENT DOES NOT RESTRICT MY FREEDOM OF CHOICE BUT IN FACT HEIGHTENS ITS IMPORTANCE**

**T**o me, commitment means choosing one of many options and then giving my best to it through thick and thin. In some areas like marriage it is for life (at least for me), while in other areas like a job it is for a certain (usually long) length of time.

One hears that ours is a commitment-shy generation. Somehow commitment has seemed rather natural for me. By nature I am an intense person. Whatever I choose to do I put my whole heart into it. I become passionately involved. At times, those around me feel uncomfortable or even threatened by that intensity. So it can bring sadness. But because it is wholehearted, while it lasts, it does bring its own satisfaction.

Commitment does not restrict my freedom of choice but in fact heightens its importance by giving my choice sufficient longevity. In relationships, commitment adds to the security

have to go for hours without electric power, it is a useful philosophy!

I am also committed to Antarnaad, a monthly magazine in Marathi—the language of the state of Maharashtra where I live. Though spoken by over 80 million people, Marathi has a hard job surviving with the onslaught of a global language like English. The purpose of Antarnaad is to sustain our language through good literary and social journalism. It's an issue of one's overall ethos and culture. Language is not just a means of communication. It embodies the soul of a civilisation. God created ethnic and cultural diversity and language is a wonderful expression of that diversity. Like bio-diversity it must be preserved. This wider perspective sustains my overall commitment to my work. And of course, having a wife who shares that commitment is a great help!

Fergal Keane is a Special Correspondent for BBC News. He has won several awards including an OBE for his work in Africa. His latest book, 'There Will be Sunlight Later—A Memoir Of War' (Harper Collins) will be published in Autumn 2004.

## 1. What sustains your commitment to truth?

I realise that at any given time I am only going to get at part of the truth. I think there are inherent dangers in thinking you alone have access to the unvarnished truth. That being said, I believe the kind of truths I seek—about the reality of human experience in places of conflict, about the use and abuse of power—are central to our human survival. I am sustained mainly by the example of others, people who don't have the same protection that I do. Let me give you some examples: there are human rights activists in Zimbabwe who go out every day and night to record the abuses being inflicted on the population. They risk their liberty and their



lives to do so. In countries like Burma there are activists who organise on university campuses in spite of the presence of countless informers. Such people give me courage. I can always get on an aircraft and leave. They cannot yet they continue to struggle.

## 2. How do you sustain your commitment to your work/calling?

The most important thing for me is to realise that it's not just about getting stories. There is a much bigger picture that has to do with human dignity. I like to see myself as one small cog in a vast worldwide machine which keeps pressure on governments to live up to their responsibilities. It is easy to get bogged down in the mechanics of journalism and in the competition which is so much part of the job. But if I remember the wonder of each human life then I am easily sustained.

Goretti Nguyen anticipates a lifelong interest in human development. She is a Program Assistant in the Child Sponsorship department of World Vision. Previously she was a youth co-ordinator with Initiatives of Change in Australia.



I don't care too much for politics. And frankly, I care even less about the endless debates. Absolute poverty is absolutely wrong and my heart breaks at the triumph of evil.

A commitment is intentional; living a humane life is what we are called to do. To feed the hungry, shelter the destitute and love the unloved is not a cause. Just as breathing is essential for our existence, I feel it is natural to want to alleviate human misery.

My world vision is much more enduring than my job with World Vision Australia, a Christian overseas aid and development agency. I long for the fullness of life for all but especially for the people of Africa.

In the end, we all must choose. We can be those who make it happen, those who let it happen or those who wonder what happened!

# THEN IT DAWNED ON ME THAT IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT ANOTHER PERSON DOES TO ME, MY RESPONSE AND BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS THEM IS MY RESPONSIBILITY

**Cheryl Wood taught for five years before resigning to work full-time with Initiatives of Change. For the last 25 years she and her husband Rob have been an integral part of a vibrant community in Melbourne welcoming people of all faiths and cultures.**



**T**o be 25 and feel there was very little in the world I could put my trust in was a hopeless state to be in. That was until I went to an international conference where people had sparkle in their eyes, hope for the future, and an almost tangible sense of purpose about their lives. I wanted what they had. I decided to give the concept of personal change a go, to take the idea of God seriously, and to accept an invitation to live in a community home in London to try out these ideas for a few months.

I discovered that life could be fun; that cynicism and hope were not compatible; that I could make mistakes and still be loved; that I really did love my country; that I could begin to work out

difficult relationships; that my life did count in the whole scheme of things; and so much more.

When I returned to Australia after more than two years in that home, I sought the same type of situation. Naturally, in Australia the people, the culture, and my own expectations were all different. It wasn't always easy but the choice facing me was the same—did I want to revert to living life on my terms or was I prepared to live for something bigger? The choice was a clear one and when honestly faced, the conviction that persisted was: Give your best to the people you meet, to life as it is, and trust.

After some time I married. Initially my husband didn't want to live in community but it seemed clear to me that this was our chance to give something to others. We talked it over and eventually agreed to live in the community home I had based in when I first returned to Australia.

I didn't foresee the different demands the role of a married person would bring and I suddenly found myself feeling lonely. No longer a single person I often wasn't included in leisure activities I had enjoyed before, and with no children I didn't have the challenges many of my married colleagues had.

On top of this I seemed to have a personality clash with someone else, and often I just couldn't handle it. Everything in me wanted 'out'. Then it dawned on me that it doesn't matter what another person does to me, my response and behaviour towards them is my responsibility. What they do or say is their responsibility.

The other major challenge I have experienced, and recently very dramatically, is when someone joins the community who doesn't really want to



be there. In the last instance the person concerned had a hidden agenda. It was extremely difficult. In the end we felt that for the sake of the community we needed to suggest they move on.

Knowing that I can always seek direction from a source of inner inspiration that I can trust, and that some idea will always come no matter how insignificant or small it may seem, is one of the main reasons I have been able to keep going. Because I believe in a Creator, I can care deeply about the wrongs in the world and give my best to 'make a difference' but at the end of the day, there is a basic sense of peace. Another vital ingredient my husband has taught me is a sense of fun and the ability to laugh, with others and at oneself.

So, 30 years on I am still living in community and still enjoying life. Ofcourse I would love a home of my own with a garden, where I imagine life would be much more manageable. But I am confronted with a world in incredible need, and when I face that same question I mentioned earlier, the answer is, 'For now you are where you are meant to be.'

**Neichu Dz. Angami is a counsellor for drug addicts, alcoholics and people with HIV/AIDS in her native Nagaland (North-East India). She also works with school teachers and church leaders on conflict resolution and mediation programs.**

**T**he following words by Phyllis Tribble encapsulate what I live for:

Speak the truth to the people  
Talk sense to the people  
Free them with reason  
Free them with honesty  
Free the people with love and courage and care  
for their being.

Everyone has a story. This is a gift. When we

## RECOGNITION OF PAIN IS THE BEGINNING OF HOPE

share that gift we empower and liberate others to embrace their own stories. I am committed both to sharing my story, and to listening to and celebrating other people's stories. By sharing in this way, we give meaning to our



existence and weave a vision for our ourselves and our world.

I spent a year in Israel/Palestine last year meeting people 'where they are at' and listening to their perspective. By opening my heart and life to them I hoped to create space for a shared humanity to emerge. Every person has the right to be heard, no matter how gruesome and brutal their story. Recognition of pain is the beginning of hope.

My vision for Nagaland my home, is to see our churches and leaders becoming 'mobile listening stations'. Recently I led an interactive session with 22 young men and women who are living with HIV. I could not find a more meaningful subject for our dialogue than storytelling. The response to some of the stories I shared indicated that some serious soul-searching had taken place.

I believe that when we come together to share our struggles, the spirit of our nation will awaken and we will be liberated to stand for justice and truth. We will give a human face to confronting issues such as AIDS, drug addiction, militarisation, corruption, violence and killings. Those of us who are committed to bringing hope and reconciliation are sustained by our belief in a God of love and grace.

**K. Haridas is the Executive Director of an educational foundation in Malaysia. He is also Vice Chairman of MRA-Initiatives of Change, Malaysia and participates actively in interfaith dialogue and social justice issues.**

I was fortunate at 19 to clarify my beliefs and values through meeting the ideas of Moral Re-Armament (now Initiatives of Change). The notion of commitment revealed itself when I had to stand up and apply these beliefs and values to my own life and exemplify them through my conduct and behaviour.



**THIS INTERACTION BETWEEN ONE'S BELIEFS, VALUES AND THEIR APPLICATION IN ACTION IS A GOOD YARDSTICK OF ONE'S SENSE OF COMMITMENT**

This interaction between one's beliefs, values and their application in action is a good yardstick of one's sense of commitment. Whenever I rationalise, compromise or justify negating my beliefs I undercut this sense of commitment. To be rational is to be pragmatic and this can lead to a loss of clarity between means and ends.

Renaissance and constant renewal are critical. Times of silence, daily reflection and sharing my thoughts with others, provide avenues whereby I can take positions without compromising my beliefs and values. Such times provide me with the opportunity to grow within, to reflect upon the issues at hand and to respond in keeping with my sense of purpose and cause.

The greatest challenge is to admit one's error, weakness, reactions, antipathies or prejudices that often colour one's position. Recognising this or realising this provides scope for growth. No one is perfect but in our imperfections lie the opportunity for change. I have continuously recognised my failures and am often regretful

of my conduct and behaviour. Nevertheless, this has taught me to be humble in my victories and hopeful in my failures.

Recently a colleague of mine died of cancer. I visited him in hospital. Later several friends remarked how happy he was that I had visited him. Though friends there were times as we worked together when differences of opinion surfaced. These occasions strained our relationship.

When I realised how much our meeting in hospital had meant to him I was moved to reflect

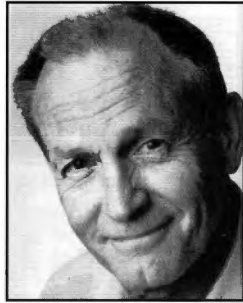
upon our friendship. I then wrote him a card expressing my apologies for any hurt that I may have caused and sent him flowers. Later my wife and I visited him. We had a warm and meaningful evening together and the next day he passed away.

A chapter in a friendship closed with his passing. A closure that was happy and healing for both of us. Opportunities present themselves to all of us and were it not for the silent morning 'Quiet Time' of reflection I would have missed the preciousness of a needed response.

Reflection links beliefs to action at the level of conduct and behaviour. Ultimately, we communicate who we are not by our words or beliefs, but by how we live and conduct ourselves with our family, friends and colleagues. Who we are speaks louder than all that we say. At 53 I am most grateful to have learnt and applied simple ideas that continue to give meaning to my life.

**Born in Zambia, John Carlisle divides his time between corporate consulting and working with young people. He has a special place in his heart for the young East Europeans and believes this generation could help rescue Europe from materialism, and the corresponding selfishness, especially as they learn more of the spirit that changes lives.**

**I** was a typical '60s person, a peace and freedom lover. In 1960 I went to university in South Africa and was politicised—at an intellectual level—against apartheid. Five years on at



another university I began to move against apartheid, joining sit-ins and supporting people under house arrest. This was mainly because two Afrikaans academics (who were also ordained ministers in the Afrikaans State Church) showed enormous courage in demonstrating to those of us who went to church that the government was un-representative and its policies inhuman. They captured me with their clear vision of what human relationships should be: walking, one might say, the Sermon on the Mount. One of them, Professor Oosthuizen, was charged with illegal activities and insulted throughout his trial by the magistrate, who made it quite clear whose side he was on. The professor, who behaved with dignity, was found technically guilty, given the maximum fine, and released—whereupon he went on quietly raising the consciousness of the university about the iniquities of the apartheid regime.

On reflection though, I found that I was not whole-heartedly committed to opposing the

## I FOUND MYSELF WEEPING FOR NO REASON WHEN I WAS ALONE

government. I was self-righteously indignant, and proud to be associated with such worthy aims; but my commitment was pretty shallow. Other students, like Charles van Onselen, the university paper editor (not a frequenter of churches), were committed. He fought the policies, and our complacency, with real dedication; and continued to do so from overseas after he was banned.

He, like the Afrikaans academics, would have displayed this commitment whether or not it was the '60s because he understood that wrongs had to be righted. He could have been jailed, banned, placed under house arrest or even made to disappear; so he lived with fear and loneliness, was misunderstood and unemployed, and knew that he might be betrayed. Integrity welded out of the furnace of overcoming fear is capable of great love and amazing deeds. He continues to make an impact in South Africa today.

I, in the meantime, went to England and really joined the '60s! I demonstrated against the Vietnam war, wore sandals and hipsters, and had hair down to my jaw-line. The Rolling Stones were my favourite group and I danced to their music night and day with real abandon. On the dance floor I could chat up almost any girl and take things as far as possible, because, hey, free love and all that. I wove my protesting, partying way across to Spain where I ran with the bulls at Pamplona, and then to France where I got drunk outside the Louvre, and then back to South Africa where my little affairs multiplied as the

# NOW A WAYWARD WORLD IS BEGINNING TO SEARCH ANXIOUSLY FOR ETERNAL VALUES AGAIN AS MATERIAL SOLUTIONS GATHER DUST

protestor parties grew wilder. Funnily enough, I never took drugs, kept up my attendance at Catholic Mass on great feast days, and also found myself weeping for no reason when I was alone.

All this continued to the end of the '60s. I thought I was part of the great revolution. In fact I had totally missed the great revolution, which was happening quietly all around me, as people my age inspired by such ideas as those of Moral Re-Armament were changing the world as real revolutionaries do. They were challenging the self-gratification, the shallow relationships and the aimlessness around them, by their vision of a world where real purpose, peace and dignity reigns.

They challenged the decadence of the time by their unselfish goals, their personal integrity, and by their submission to the will of God—in which they found real freedom. I, however, was trapped in following the in-crowd, where individuals compromised their real values, and where a perceptive person could see the despair and hopelessness in our faces as we swept from one cheap thrill to the next.

These were truly the people of the future, with their vision for re-making the world, their courtesy (which allowed their companions to feel listened to), their punctiliousness (which made them utterly reliable), and their inner

guidance. They, who seemed old-fashioned to me, were actually the new wineskins carrying the new wine that would refresh the world.

Today, they remain standing where they have always stood—at the barricades where decadence spends itself. These are the people who refused to lower their standards even when the popular churches did; who stood out as committed to the values of decency and honesty when to do so was to be considered a right-winger, and to be committed to changing the world meant enduring rejection and ridicule; and who consequently made a huge difference.



Now a wayward world is beginning to search anxiously for eternal values again as material solutions gather dust in the attics of failed government policies. Absolute standards are

always a source of ridicule to those who wish to be shown the easy way, who want the short cut on the crooked path. The challenge to the writers and readers of this comet, *Global Express*, is to be proud of whatever faith you have and wave your banner high in the service of God and humanity. Only then will you be truly human and experience the great joy of commitment, as you weave back together the garment of love and duty that is the rightful cloak of this wonderful world we live in—and you will remake the world.



Be still and know that I am God

Psalm 46: 10

Bhutanese prayer flags, Photo: Gail Trevelyan



# Scattered Thoughts

The nature of the rain is the same and yet it produces thorns  
in the marsh and flowers in the garden - Arabic saying

Don't just do something, sit there

It all comes down to  
whether miracles happen  
around us or not  
- Frank Buchman

The greatest prayer is patience  
- Buddha

Freedom means letting go.  
What is sin? All that binds you  
- Sri Nisargadatta Maharaji

Nothing in life is to be feared.  
It is only to be understood  
- Marie Curie

There is nothing as clear-sighted  
as love - Anthony De Mello

Nature abhors a vacuum,  
and if I can only walk with  
sufficient carelessness  
I am sure to be filled  
- Henry David Thoreau

The way you look at people  
can transform them  
- Jean Vanier

If you want to build a ship,  
don't drum up people  
together to collect wood or  
assign them tasks and work,  
but rather teach them to long  
for the endless immensity of  
the sea - Saint Exupery

Seeing the job through to the end bringeth the true glory - Sir Francis Drake

